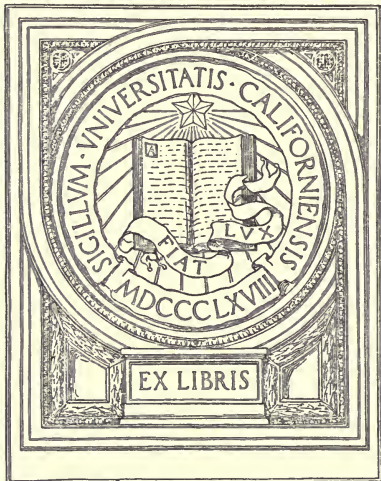


PLANTATION
BIRD-LEGENDS



MARTHA YOUNG

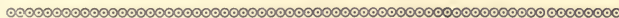
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Plantation Bird Legends





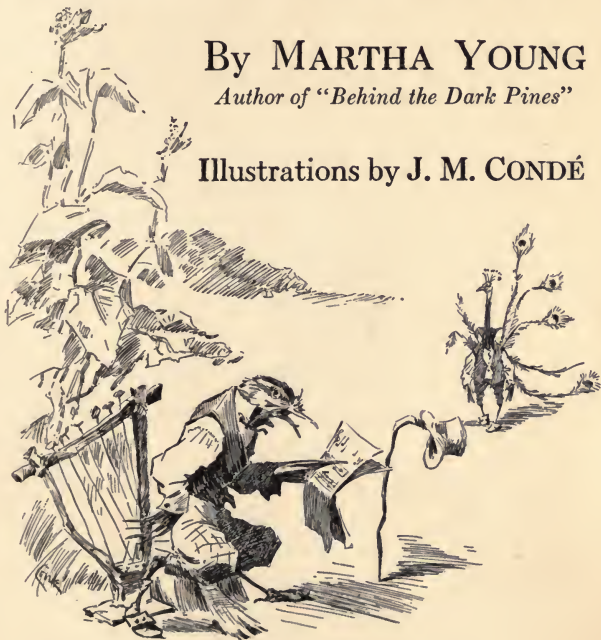
SIS' DOVE

PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

By MARTHA YOUNG

Author of "Behind the Dark Pines"

Illustrations by J. M. CONDÉ



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1916

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To all the Dear Namesakes
OF E. Y. AND A. E. Y.

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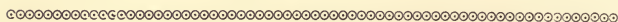
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Plantation Bird Legends



Out of Birdland

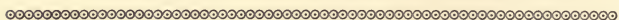


THE fluted pillars of the old house shone glitteringly white under the hot Southern sun, white in those spots that were not in their decay covered by clinging vines and rank weeds, and mosses sprung in the crevices of the masonry. The dragons and the tritons no longer spouted water into the cemented basins. Green-backed frogs and sleek lizards hopped and slid about on the weed-grown, damp places where quivering clear water had once sparkled.

From the stained windows of the basement dining-hall of the grand old house, imposing even now in its decay, peered forth at evening and at rest-time the eyes of hungry beasts stabled there. Needy they were in the midst of Nature's plenty, and all for lack of care and thought from their dusky owners. The leaden frames whence the glasses had gone were bent into fantastic shapes and were now stuffed with nondescript rags.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



In the old Quarter leading back from the "Great House," the cabins, half falling to pieces, were careening this way and that. Greater desolation it were hard to imagine. More lack of the signs of civilizing elements could nowhere be revealed than in the faces of the dusky crowds that dwelt in those cabins and in the "Great House." This house, once the home of culture and elegance, stood now deserted by its quondam white owners, as do so many of the old homesteads of the South, deserted and decaying. It held now in its decay and amidst Nature's large environments as many and as diverse households as any tenements in a city's most crowded ward.

Yet there were beyond this settlement spots of greater desolation, places not only deserted by the white people who once owned and lived there in joyous happiness, but places even shunned by the blacks to whose careless culture was now given over all the rich lands within and surrounding the swamp of the Dollyhyde.

Far down in Dollyhyde swamp was a cabin, so rude, so dilapidated, that it seemed very part of the noisome swamp itself,—low, dropping lower, grown over with mosses and weeds. It seemed no more the habitation for humanity than did the hollows of trees wherein dwelt the squirrels and the talking owls. Yet there lived the



OUT OF BIRDLAND



woman who was known on all the plantation settlements around as Witch Menée.

None knew her history. She had taken possession of the half-ruined cabin many years before. There she lived with her daughter, a queer child, as wild, as shy, as quaint as any swamp-reared creature of Nature's own upbringing. About Witch Menée gathered all the awe, all the superstition of a most ignorant people.

By all the inhabitants of all the plantations about—now for radius of many miles deserted by the white race—she was alleged to know and to practise every “conjure spell” or “conjure cure” known to the race. For her store of “powers,” she searched the forest through. Her child, Jess, followed her in all her jaunts through forest and swamp in search of herbs or insects, or small wild things to be used for “hands” or “cures.”

As the two wandered in the depths of the swamp, many were the queer stories of the denizens of the woods, the singing birds, that Menée told for the diversion of the child.

As the mocking bird trilled his medley of many songs in the mighty, white-blossomed magnolias, whose flowering sent a fine odor over all the swamp, Menée told the child many a legend of “Mister Mockin' Bird's” deeds and misdeeds in those mystic days known to the negro as “de fust times.”



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



At night as they two wandered in search of those queer wares of the "root worker," procurable only in darkness, the mother told her child stories of the owls, the great talking owls of the swamp, of the little owls whose quivering cries are said by all negroes to bode ill to the hearer, unless the ill be diverted by counter charm or incantation.

These stories Witch Menée's daughter retold to the children of the Dollyhyde Plantation. The relation of these stories was the one tie that bound her to the youth of her race, for even to those half-barbarous children Menée's daughter seemed a quaint and uncanny little creature.

But those children crowded about her when she came to the Quarter to sell her mother's "cures" and "spells" to beg for her stories of Birdland.

The children sought customers for her and went with her from cabin to cabin in order to hasten the business of her visit and thus to free her for telling the stories that they never tired of hearing.

These tales, indeed, became ere long part of her chief stock in trade, and her audience grew from the children to the elders, for the negroes are but a race of children.

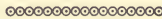
They gathered all about her to listen, to comment, to make addenda to her tales.



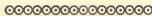
SIS' DOVE



Oftentimes gifts were added to her store of gains from her sales when the stories happened to particularly delight her audience. A favorite story with her audience was the story of "Sis' Dove":



Sis' Dove



"**W**HAT 'bout Sis' Dove?" began the little black creature. "Ain't I done tole you 'bout Sis' Dove? Yes, I is. You ain't hearn it? Well, de way my mammy tole de tale to me hit went sorter so:

"Sis' Dove she know mo'n anybody or anything in de worl'. She know pintedly de time anybody gwine die. You 'll hear her moanin' fer a passin' soul 'fo' you hear de bell tone.

"She know 'fo' cotton plantin' time whe'r de craps dat getherin' 'll be good or bad.

"'Fo' folks break up de new ground or bust out middles, Sis' Dove she know what de yield 'll be.

"She know it, and she 'll tell it, too. 'Caze ev'ybody know if Sis' Dove coo on de right of a man plowin', dar 'll be good crap dat year. But ef she coo on de lef', dar 'll be a failery crap dat year.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

“Sis’ Dove she know ’bout all de craps dat grow out de ground. But she ’special know ’bout corn, fer she plant de fust grain er corn dat ever was plant in de whole worl’.

“Whar she git it? Dat’s hit now. Whar’d she git dat fust grit er dirt she brung ter start de worl’ when ever’thing was water? Um-hum! You tell me dat, I may tell you dis.

“But dat one grain er corn is de caze uv her bein’ so rich now. Co’s she rich. Ain’t she got a crap-lien on all de fiel’s in de whole worl’? Dat’s ’caze she brung de fust grain.

“Dar’s a season sot in de book fer ter do her no harm, des let her eat corn in ever’ fiel’ she so please.

“She know whar de very ends of de worl’ is. You listen in spring, and you’ll hear her sing:

I can fly ter de Eas’!
Long way and a little piece.
I can fly ter de Wes’!
Need not stop ter res’.
I can fly to de true Norf eye!
Ever’ bird I can pass by.
I can fly ter de Souf
Singin’ in my mouf.

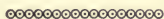


THE OWL AND PEACOCK



“Chillen, dar ain’t nothin’ Sis’ Dove don’t know. Talk ‘bout de fur gates er de worl’, she know whar de ve’y postes is sot. What is dar Sis’ Dove don’t know? And de mos’ of her knowledge she keep ter herse’f.”

The old people of the small story-teller’s audience vouched for the truth of this story. But youth is ever full of questioning and of doubting, so one slim, brown fellow in the audience suggested that he had always heard that the Owl was the wisest of all birds. While the discussion waxed warm between those who asserted greatest wisdom for “Sis’ Dove” and those who claimed that prerogative for the Owls, Witch Menée’s daughter be-thought herself of, and told with unction, the story of



The Owl and Peacock

How They Fought and Changed Eyes



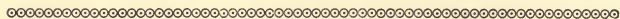
“**O**WL loves to come out night-times. Makes ‘tense she so sugar and salt dat sun’ll melt her.

“Jedge Peacock loves de brightest sunshine; he turns round and round in it to view his shadder. Dat shadder don’t show de many eyes in his tail and he so glad of dat.

“His tail useter be plain fair blue.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Dem days, ’long of his havin’ no work to do, and also ’long of his bein’ mighty pretty, he useter laugh much at Mis’ Owl, ’caze she al’a’s round de cook pot. He laugh ’caze all day she peep out of her holler tree to ax ev’y-body passin’:

“ ‘Who cooks fer y’ all?’

“One day Jedge Peacock took his stand right outside Mis’ Owl’s holler tree.

“De Jay pass by. Mis’ Owl come out wid a skillit-lid in her hand and ax Mister Jay :

“ ‘Who-oo-o-who cooks fer y’ all?’

“Jedge Peacock, he laugh loud.

“De Red Bird fly pas’. Mis’ Owl come out wid a gridiron in her hand :

“ ‘Who-oo-o-who cooks fer y’ all?’

“Jedge Peacock, he laugh and laugh.

“De Dove flutter by. Mis’ Owl peep out wid a bread-hoe :

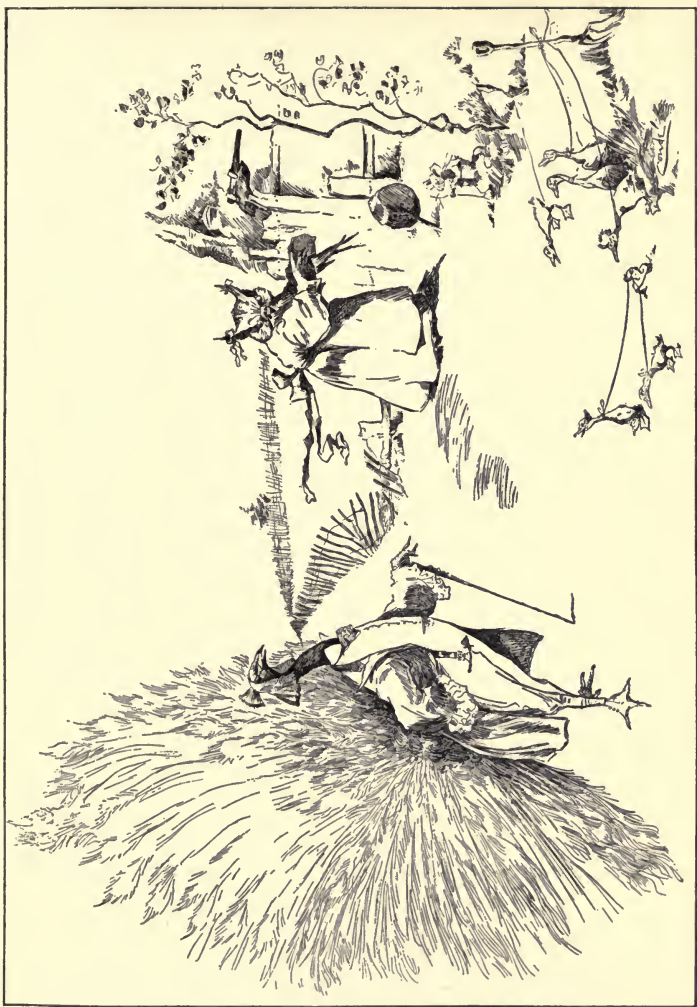
“ ‘Who-oo-o-who coo-oo-ooks fer y’ all?’

“Jedge Peacock, des mos’ kill hisse’f a-laughin’.

“Mis’ Owl she git mad den and she offer to fight. And den dey fit.

“Chillen! Did n’t dey fit!

“Dey was mad. Yankees and Rebs wa’n’t nothin’ to de mad dey was. Dey was dat mad!



“ Mis’ Owl, she git mad den and she offer to fight.”



THE OWL AND PEACOCK



“Dey fit and dey fit twel Mister Peacock scratch de sight clean out er Mis’ Owl’s eyes.

“But one did n’t get much better of y’ other ; Jedge Peacock, he so sorry twel yet dat dem eyes got set on his pretty, plain blue tail.

“Dem eyes dar twel yit.

“Two eyes before and a hundred eyes behind, dat’s ole Jedge Peacock.

“Mis’ Owl, she so sorry dat she fit at all, ’caze all de sight of all de owls’ eyes in all de worl’ des got fixed to de Peacock’s tail.

“Mis’ Owl can’t even bear now to peep at daytime out of her holler tree. Hatter wait twel night even to take a peep out.

“But dey bof make ’tense dey ain’t hurt and dey don’t keer. Dat’s de way wid folks when dey fights. Jedge Peacock say he like to see de worl’ bof ways. Mis’ Owl say she sho’ do like moonlight better ’n she do common daylight—what ev’ybody can see good in.”

After the relation of the misfortunes that befell even the wise and the great, the dark little story-teller tucked her head on one side, and asked her audience :

“What dat ? Don’t I hear Mister Woodpecker at it ?”

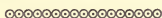
And to the talk that followed concerning the Woodpecker’s habits and ways must inevitably follow the story of



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Mister Woodpecker's Work



“ I HEAR folks say even a worm 'll turn. Hit look like ter me hit's even or odd ef he do turn. Br'er Woodpecker gwine git him airy way.

“ Dat's what Woodpecker's doin' when he gwine round and round a tree :

Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap!

Rap! Rap!

Whar you?

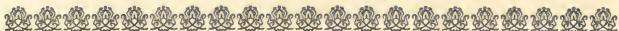
“ When Mister Worm drawed up close under de bark hear dat *Tap! Tap!* he's skeered. He think ter hisse'f:

Door shut. Winder down;

Yet I fear I gwine be foun'.

“ Br'er Woodpecker, he same like folks workin'; he know luck's lyin' somewhar — ef you strike it. But he study 'bout *whar*.

“ De tree so big, de bark so thick. Look like a livin' ain't made quick. He put his head on one side. He thinks ef de worm dar, he can't find whar. He 'bout ter make up his mind ter stop work and get ter studyin', but den he got folks ter feed, so here he go :



MISTER WOODPECKER'S WORK



Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap!

Rap! Rap!

Whar you?

“He twis’ his head and lay his yeah down ter de trunk er de tree fer ter listen:

Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap!

Rap! Rap!

Whar you?

“Well, den! Dat skeer Mister Worm so bad dat he study ’bout how kin he keep still wid dat gwine on, so — he turn over.

“Dat’s hit now. Br’er Woodpecker heah him easy as he do turn. Den hits:

Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap!

Rap! Rap!

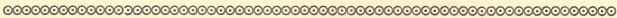
Dar you!

“Des one good *tap-rap* over de place whar he heah Mister Worm turn and den he have him. La, den. Des like folks. Why can’t dey keep still when dey heah trouble comin’?

“Dat’s de way Mister Woodpecker gits his livin’. *Rap! Tap!* Listen. You can see him at dat all summer long.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Tap! Tap!
 Whar you?
 Rap! Rap!
 Dar you!

“Mister Woodpecker he’s a ’dustrious bird all de time. All time workin’. When y’o’her birds ready to lay by, him ’n’ his folks is still and yit peck, peck, peckin’ at a rotten tree fer to holler out a nest. Dat’s how he make his nest. He peck, peck, peck at de rotten wood; he make a round hole; he study ’bout dat hole is mos’ big ’nough. He git in hit. He turn all round. Not quite big ’nough. *Tap, tap, peck!* He make dat hole little bigger. He whirl all round in hit ag’in. Mos’ big ’nough. *Rap! Rap!* Peckin’ ag’in. Mister Woodpecker, he turn all round ag’in in dat smooth round hole. Big ’nough now. Den sech another ’joyment twixt him ’n’ Mis’ Woodpecker. Nes’ all ready. Den him ’n’ her, dey des flutter ’n’ fly and call round dat nes’. You can hear ’em at it:

Rap! Tap!
 Our nes
 Is de bes’.
 Tap! Rap!”

When Jess had told this story, she was minded to emulate the Woodpecker’s industry which she had so



“Den sech another 'joyment 'twixt him 'n' Mis' Woodpecker.”



BR'ER BUZZARD'S FUST FRIEND



lauded. She declared that she must hurry home to carry to her mother the pail of buttermilk given her as a reward for her morning's recitative entertainment of the Quarter. But she was urged for "just one more," and the story she consented to tell was that of



Br'er Buzzard's Fust Friend

How He Treated Johnny Mingo with Ingratitude, and Why He Bows to Old Negroes



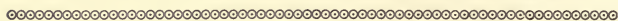
"**H**HEY! he wo'th mo' money dan any bird now. "If you kill him, hit gwine cost you cash,—ten dollar or five dollar, I disremember which. What-uvver hit is, hit should be mo', 'caze Br'er Buzzard, he clean up de earth, he do.

"Way back times, dough, he had no friends. White folks seen dat he was black, and ole, and bal', and po', and did n't have no house,—y'o'her birds all had homes er dey own,—he was des cuffed and bluffed round mightily.

"Dem way back days dar was des one ole Affikan man what dey done fool over heah 'crost de ocean wid a red handkercher. He got dat red handkercher yit, him and his 'folks yit wearin' it fer a sign.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Ole Johnny Mingo, dat was him, he was black, and he was ole, and he was bal’, and he did n’t have no house neither. He got his livin’ choppin’ in a patch er kershaws and potatoes for Mister White Man.

“De old folks do say kershaw seed and ’tater slips floated over from Affika ’hind de ship dat dey stole ole Johnny Mingo over in. I dunno how or whether ’t was.

“Johnny Mingo feel sorter sorry for Br’er Buzzard, mos’ same like he was kin to him, and he al’a’s put a ’tater in de ashes on de hearth, whar he roast hisn, fer Br’er Buzzard also.

“Uvver day, day by day, Br’er Buzzard come for dat ’tater.

“Uvver day, day by day, Johnny Mingo hand Br’er Buzzard dat ’tater, and uvver day as he hand hit, he say :

O Br’er Buzzard, you fly so high,

Tell me whicher way Affika lie !

“Old Br’er Buzzard he retch out his hand fer dat ’tater. He take it in his claw. He bow his head down like he do twel yit ; he say :

Um-yum !

(Smack his jaws.)

Um-yum ! Johnny Mingo !

Um-yum ! Johnny Mingo !

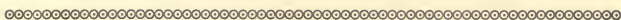
I ’ll tell you dat to-morrow !



“Uvver day . . . Br’ er Buzzard come for dat ’tater.’”



WITH THE QUARTER FOLKS



“He ain’t tole twel yit, ole Br’er Buzzard ain’t. And, chillen, he ain’t gwine tell. He done gone State eviden’ wid Mister White Man now. Johnny Mingo was his fust friend, but he got mo’ friends dan Johnny Mingo is got now.

“Mister White Man and de State done make Br’er Buzzard wo’th money now.

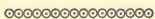
“Yit Br’er Buzzard ain’t los’ his manners; twel yit ef he meet a ole black man, real Affika man, in de road, he’ll bow his head, an’ make dat promise:

Um-yum! Johnny Mingo!

I’ll tell you dat to-morrow!”



With the Quarter Folks



MORE and more the woman called Witch Menée grew to dread contact with humanity. The innate kinship of all human beings with Nature was fastening itself on her. The sweetness of solitude fell over her being with no cloying. The bartering of her queer wares she had given over almost entirely to her daughter.

The daughter had learned the value of her wares. She could haggle bravely over the price of wild-cherry bark, steeped in home-brewed cordial of the fruit of the tree, a



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



sure cure for malaria, or, in plantation jargon, “hilarious chills.” She could exact as much corn meal as her shoulders could bear up under in exchange for the rattlers of an old, old, old rattlesnake, which worn tightly wrapped in the hair would cure the worst of chronic headaches.

She knew, — alas for the cruelty of ignorance and barbarity! — that a love-sick dusky damsel would give almost her all for the parched and powdered heart cut from the body of a live dove, — a sure love potion.

When good sale of her herbs and cures had been made, Witch Menée’s daughter turned to listen to the crowd of dusky children that came importuning her for a story. They were scarcely stories to those children, nor to her, — but strange truths from a misty past, “de fur back times” — these stories of “Old Br’er Buzzard, who was den even mo’ lak folks dan he do be now.” The story that she told at their importunities was of



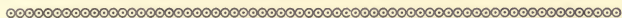
Br’er Buzzard’s Just Taste



“**W**HEN Br’er Buzzard was young, he was white as anybody’s child. You’d a tuck him ’n’ his li’l sisters and brothers ter be Mis’ Tuckey’s chillen, you



BR'ER BUZZARD'S FUST TASTE



would ef you had run upon 'em cheepin' and peepin' in de ole holler log whar dar mammy done lef' 'em.

“Dat de way dey come by dere fust name, I reckon, which dey yit got — Tuckey Buzzard.

“He was des a waitin' boy round de house den, — Br'er Buzzard was.

“Ev'y mornin' you hear Mis' Susan call him up, dis-a-way : ‘O Tuckey Buzzard!’

“‘Yas, ma'am!’ Dat what he say : ‘Yas, ma'am!’ He fetch up his shoulders, flop his wings, hop on one foot, and say, lak he do say now — and bow : ‘Yas, ma'am.’

“'T was de same thing ev'y mornin' :

O Tuckey Buzzard!

Yas, ma'am!

Have yer fed my geese?

Yas, ma'am!

Gittin' fat wid goose grease?

Yas, ma'am!

Feed 'em on barley and rye?

Yas, ma'am!

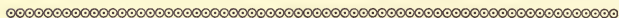
Feed 'em so high!

Yas, ma'am!

“Ev'y time he fetch up his shoulders, flop his wings, hop on one foot, bow his head : ‘Yas, ma'am!’



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Den he hatter go git his own vittles, des little greens biled wid des little bit er meat. He croak deep in his throat ev’y time he eat dem greens, biled wid des little bit er meat.

Hit’s rough,

Hit’s tough.

Not ’nough grease aroun’

Ter make hit scarce go down !

“ One day he croakin’ and eatin’, and eatin’ and croakin’, when way up in de sky one of his kinfolks go by and he holler down :

“ ‘ Sis’ Cow ’s dead.’

“ Br’er Buzzard he look up from dem green vittles ; he say :

“ ‘ How ’d she die ?’

“ Den dey two go on des dis way : one up high in de sky, and one down on de groun’ :

Ole Sis’ Cow ’s dead !

How ’d she die ?

She died kickin’ —

her foots.

Ole Sis’ Cow ’s dead !

How ’d she die ?

She died lickin’

Her tongue.



“Hit’s rough,
Hit’s tough.”



BR'ER BUZZARD'S FUST TASTE



Ole Sis' Cow's dead !
 How'd she die ?
 She died flickin'
 Her tail.

Ole Sis' Cow's dead !
 How'd she die ?
 She died prickin'
 Her yeahs.

“ Br'er Buzzard, his wings was gettin' pretty longsome, and pretty strongsome den, he pick up a long string er greens and shake hit in his bill ; he croak out :

Hit's rough —
 Hit's tough —
 'Tain't 'nough —
 Poor stuff !

“ Ole Big Buzzard he fly round and round, high in de sky ; he say :

Ole Mis' Cow's gone — um !

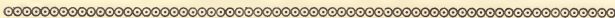
“ Br'er Buzzard, he croak back low down on de groun' !
 Whar she lie ?

“ An' so dey go on, one sky high, one down on de groun' :

Ole Sis' Cow's gone — um.
 Whar she lie ?
 Right down un'er de hill.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Whar she lie?

Down on de ditch bank still.

Whar she lie?

Way up 'bove de mill!

I 'm gwine ter git my fill.

I 'm gwine!

I 'm flyin'!

I 'm gwine!

I 'm flyin'!

“Wa'n't dat too much fer young Br'er Buzzard! He stretch out his wings — dey air gittin' long, dey air gittin' strong, — he holler out:

I 'm gwine, too!

I 'm flyin', too!

“He ain't been a waitin' boy round de house no mo'. Dat's hit now. Up he went, off he went, over de hill he went, and on de ditch bank dar he met his fellers. Den dey all 'gun dere march — dey does dat twel yit.

“One ole Buzzard wid a red mouf, he march fust wid de ban' — he walk roun' and roun', all de rest of 'em hop, and flop, and fetch up dey shoulders as dey sits in de dead trees nigh de bank, er dey walk long 'hind de fust one on de ditch bank.



BR'ER BUZZARD'S FUST TASTE



“Fust one he march, fetch up his shoulders, flop his wings, hop; he say:

Gone — um! Gone — um!

“Nex' one come behind him. He fetch up his shoulders, he flop his wings; he hop; he say:

I come fer — yo' life!

I come fer — yo' life!

“Nex' one, he make de three. He come 'long, fetch up his shoulders, flop his wings, hop; he say:

Ship-sharp! Knife!

Ship-sharp! Knife!

“De nex' one — dat's de fo', — he come 'long 'hind de y'o'her one and two and three, dat's gone on, he fetch up his shoulders, flop his wings, hop; he say:

Tainty meat's better — oh!

'N fresh meat 'n' greens — so!

“Law-sy-massy me! Ain't you never hearn Buzzards say, 'Gone-um'?

“I'm is. I'm is seed 'em wid dese eyes. I'm is hearn 'em wid dese yeahs. I knows dey says it. Hit's des like I tell you:

“Fust one:

Gone — um! Gone — um!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Nex’ one :

I come fer yo’ life!

I come fer yo’ life!

“ Den de nex’ one :

Ship-sharp! Knife!

Ship-sharp! Knife!

“ Nex’ one — dat ’s fo’ :

Tainty meat ’s better — oh !

’N fresh meat ’n’ greens — so !

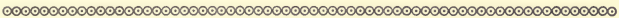
“ Den dey all falls in. And atter dat day, Br’er Buzzard he al’a’s flew wid de flock. He ain’t nuvver gone ’bout de house no mo’. He blacker’n airy one of de drove now. Some folks is even feared fer a Buzzard’s shadder ter fall on ’em as dey fly over. Hit is bad luck. Mos’ folks ’ll dodge even de shadder of a Buzzard. But ef you wants a chile ter grow up to be rale soople-j’inted, kill a Buzzard and bile him whole, and take de grease offen de pot and ’n’int dat chile’s j’intz wid de grease. He be des ez soople a chile as you ’ll keer ter see.”

Of course, there followed this announcement orders galore for buzzard grease, for what doting mother does not desire that her child be supple !

Jess, pleased with the success of her ruse, if ruse it was,



JUDGE PEACOCK'S WILD OATS



the relating of this old superstition of the efficacy of buzzard grease, proceeded without overmuch persuasion to tell the story of



How Judge Peacock Sowed His Wild Oats



“**D**EM what is greedy to gain is sho’ gwine get los’; and stingy people git missed of what dey is got. Hit been dat way all de time. Hit gwine ter be dat way all time.

“’Fo’ de Peacock got ter be de Judge, hit come to pass dat he des young and foolish and skittish like young folks is, and do be.

“’T was in a long cool spell, and he ain’t had nothin’ good ’n’ green to eat in so long dat he hongry fer de fresh.

“He stood in de sunshine, he did, and he study ’bout how could he git hold of somethin’ green.

“Mockin’ Bird was flutterin’ in de trees on de off side of de garden, ’caze winter don’t drive off de Mockin’ Bird, — dat is, not fur.

“Mockin’ Bird sing:

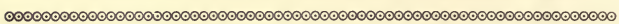
What you studyin’ ’bout?

What you studyin’ ’bout?

So fine! So fine!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Mister Peacock was so fine dem days, — all fine den. His rusty foots was even fine and smooth den.

“ Mister Peacock, he say : ‘ I ’m rale stomp-down hongry fer de fresh.’

“ Mister Mockin’ Bird al’a’s was give ter tellin’ all he did know. Chillen, don’t nuvver eat a mockin’ bird’s egg, ’caze ef you do, dat’ll make you tell all you know.

“ Dat’s so. He up and tole Mister Peacock right den ’bout Banker Crawfish have, like he usual do, done put up des a bank full of greens, young cotton-bolls, oats, rye, barley, all tender and green.

“ Ev’ything in Mister Crawfish’s bank dat a varmint or insec’, bird or beas’ could ax fer ter he’p ’em stand a cool spell.

“ ‘ O la!’ sez Br’er Peacock. ‘ Don’t say no mo’, my mouf des waterin’ now. I ’m gwine ter dat bank.’

“ Den sho’ ’nough, off he put. In de fiel’, fur from Banker Crawfish house, he come ’pun Banker Crawfish hisse’f.

“ Banker Crawfish, he mons’us perlite. He step back and make his obejiance, he do. Step back, and bow, des so —

“ Step back, bow, raise bof hands ter his head, des so — like he gwine tetch his hat ter Mister Peacock. But he keep travellin’ toward home, Banker Crawfish do. Keep



JUDGE PEACOCK'S WILD OATS

gwine backward, so as he can fool and 'ceive folks 'bout whar he live, and keep his Bank Er Richness.

" But young Mister Peacock, he tall 'nough fer ter see clean o'er Banker Crawfish head. He see de hole he gwine fer, and little mo'n he got dar fust. Des big 'nough dat hole was fer ter let a dime go in !

" Den how yer gwine ter git dem greens out ?

" Young Mister Peacock, he dunno.

" Banker Crawfish, he step back ag'in, make his obejiance, make like he gwine tetch his hat, and down in de hole he go.

" Dar ! Mister Peacock outside. He was mad ! Look like he could des smell de rich pot er greens inside a-b'ilin'.

" He holler. O la ! did n't he holler :

" ' Lemme right in ! Er I 'll dig yer right out !'

" Banker Crawfish ain't payin' no 'tention.

" ' Lemme right in ! Er I 'll dig yer right out !'

" Ev'ything in de hole des ez still.

" ' Lemme right in ! Er I 'll dig yer right out !'

" Wid dat, young Mister Peacock, he 'gun ter stomp round that hole, and dig, and dig, and dig, and dig wid his foots.

" Dat prairie mud, hit was stiff ! Hit stuck ter young Mister Peacock's smooth foots.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ La ! Hit stickin’ dar yit.

“ He dig down ter de fust passage, one foot down in the earth, and dar he spy Banker Crawfish. Banker Crawfish, he step back, make his obejiance, lif’ his hands like he gwine tetch his hat ag’in, down he go ter de nex’ passage. ’Caze Crawfish do buil’ his house same as white folks does, long passage, short passage, and mo’ rooms ’an you can count.

“ Dar ’t was !

“ Young Mister Peacock, he dig, and dig — one foot down, two foot down, three foot down !

“ Uvver time he run up on Banker Crawfish, he bow, step back, and bow. Dat make Mister Peacock madder ’n ever.

“ He holler and he dig. He dig and he holler. But he nuvver did unkiver de richness of de Crawfish’s Bank. All he did git, ’long er bein’ so grabbin’, was rusty feet.

“ Right now he don’t like to hear nothin’ about dat day. He Jedge Peacock now. And he lay down de law dat you got no business tryin’ to break into anybody’s bank.

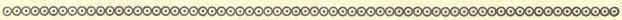
“ Right now ef you see him spreadin’ all his fine feathers in sunshine, proud to de ickle, des you say to him :

Look at yo’ rusty feet !

Look at yo’ rusty feet !



THE MOCKING BIRD'S THEFT



He'll drap his fine feathers, he will, and he'll run off and hide.

"Twel yit he say he like dry eatin' in winter, and he say dat he don't love greens outer season."

When this tale had been declared to bear truth on its face, — for what child, black or white, has not seen Mister Peacock just so piteously drop his fine feathers at mention of his rusty feet — Jess consented to tell the tale of



The Mocking Bird's Theft



"'T WAS des by de nighest dat de worl' and de folks and de critters got dat grain er corn dat Sis' Dove planted. 'T was dis way :

"No sooner did Sis' Dove plant dat grain and scratch and kiver hit dan Mister Mockin' Bird, he watch his time and step up and stole hit.

"What 'd he do wid hit ?

"Dat 's hit now.

"De whole plantation was in a 'larmment fer ter find out what he done wid dat grain er corn. 'Caze ever' critter knowed dar was promise er de pone in dat grain.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Sis’ Dove, she moan and she moan when she find hit gone. Dat was de time she start her moanin’. De onlies’ grain in all de worl’. You better b’lieve dat was pesterin’ — ter have hit gone.

“ Sis’ Dove, she ’spicioned Mister Mockin’ Bird, he been s’ much hangin’ round her house of late. But den he whistle and sing so ’ceivin’ and so sweet dat she can’t scurse b’lieve hit on him.

“ But onct de ’spicion got out hit lak a tale ’bout a nigger git ter de Grand Jury, mo’n’ mo’ ’gin ter b’lieve hit.

“ Dey birds got s’ clost behind Mister Mockin’ Bird dat he hatter fly ter Mister Man’s house for p’tection. He been stayin’ close ter Mister Man’s house ever sence. An’ dem birds, dey push on him so dat he take ’n’ drap dat corn in Mister Man’s new plowed fiel’.

“ He make a trip den ter de wile woods, fer he love de wile woods den. De birds, dey still ’spicionin’, but not knowin’, when lo an’ beholst ! who tole on Mister Mockin’ Bird but dat corn hitse’f. Up it shoot.

“ Come de spring-time, come de corn.

“ Mister Mockin’ Bird, he in de deep woods ; he don’t know what gwine on in de settlement.

“ Mis’ Dove, she watch de growin’. Fust de leaf, den de stalk, rushlin’ blade, tossle on top. Heah come de ear,



THE MOCKING BIRD'S THEFT



silk peepin' out. De shuck got dry, hit bust open — de tale was tole — grains er corn.

“Den de 'sputement 'gun afresh. Dee birds had it, jury and jedge in de big woods. Dey 'spute and dey quar'l and dey could n't 'cide. Whilst dey 'spute and quar'l, Mister Man, he tuck 'n' put a fence round dat corn.

“Law-sy-massy me! Ef Mister Mockin' Bird had n't stole dat grain er corn and put it in Mister Man's new plowed land, hit'd been wile twel yit. Des growin' fer de critters and de varmints lak de blackberries and de haws.

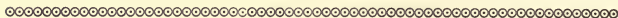
“Dey druv Mister Mockin' Bird so straight dat he tuck ter Mister Man's garden ag'in and he ain't no mo' ag'in haunt de rale wile woods. He lives twel yit clost ter folks.

“Yit 'n' still de birds make sech a 'larmment 'bout:— ‘Sis' Dove fust plant de grain!' dat Mister Man 'bleeged ter give her dat crop-lien she got some 'special season.’”

There was yet time for one story before sun setting, Jess's hour to turn her face homeward, so she consented to tell the story of



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Mis' Swallow



“NOT ef she wishter rest kin she do so. Mis' Swaller
cyar n't.

“Long time ago Ole Johnny Mingo, he was de onlies' black man in all de country round. He was ole, too, ole and po' and cole, for dar wa'n't no fire in all de worl' dem days.

“'T was so Mister Jay Bird even felt sorry fer Johnny Mingo. He slip off, Mister Jay Bird did, ter de Debbil's House whar dar was fire, — and to spare, — and he stole a little chunk er dat fire.

“Dat was fire!

“Even Jay Bird, used as he was to heat, knowed hit hatter be squench 'fo' ole Johnny Mingo could use hit, let 'lone Mister White Man. But Mister Jay, he ain't nuvver had no fo'thought, dough al'a's he been swift to up and steal and fly.

“Mister Debbil, he see him and run atter him and holler atter him and skeer him bad! Skeer him so bad dat Mister Jay open his mouf ter holler, — and drap de chunk er fire.

“Den Mister Debbil, he skeer Mister Jay de mo' by



MIS' SWALLOW

argufyin' wid him 'bout what business he had ter do dat!
Mister Jay, he sing out,

Yas! Yas!

I'll pay! I'll pay! I'll pay!

Yas, I'll pay!

“Des a promise. Dat's all Mister Debbil ever do want, des a lick 'n' a promise 'll suit him. And Mister Jay he payin' twel yit. He go ever' Friday wid a little stick or a little chip to ole Aunt Squatty, Mister Debbil's wife, dat he do.

“Whilst all dat was gwine on, Swaller come floatin' by and grab up de chunk, mos' fadin' out, yit hotter 'n any fire you ever did see.

“She was a fine bird dem days, Swaller was; she could walk on her two foots, or run, or fly, or swim; airy way of gwine dat dar was she could go. She knowed dat fire got-ter be squenched seven times, so down she go right den in the fust hoss-pond dat she come ter.

“Debbil yit argufyin' wid Mister Jay, payin' no 'tention ter Mis' Swaller, and th'oo de next hoss-pond she go. She go long th'oo five hoss-ponds, and she could 'a'got safe th'oo all ef hit had n' 'er been for Mister Debbil's wife, ole Aunt Squatty.

“Ole Aunt Squatty seed what Swaller was doin' and no



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

sooner Mis' Swaller flash out de hoss-pond, dat make de six, dan she run atter Mis' Swaller wid a red-hot poker.

"Dar! She hit Mis' Swaller's two foots, — ker blom! Dem two foots des swivvel up, dey gits des as weakly! Dem two foots is swivvel and weakly twel yit, and nuvver sence is dey been able ter bear up de weight of Mis' Swaller.

"But Mis' Swaller wa'n't gwine ter be out-did. She flewed inter de nex' hoss-pond, she did.

"Den de fire was squenched seven times.

"Mister Debbil he heard Aunt Squatty a-scoldin' and a-scoldin', and he run out wid a past-hot shovel. He fling hit at Mis' Swaller. Hit swinge off de end of her tail feathers.

"Nummine. Dat las' lick help her some, 'caze now she can git to rest sometime by des stickin' dem sharp ends of her tail inter a chimbley er wall wid her weak foots to help some, and dat way snatch a little rest twixt whiles.

"Swinge and swivvel up like she was, she make out to fly ter ole Johnny Mingo's cabin do' and drop dat chunk er fire fer him.

"Chillen, sence dat day de ole darkeys been totin' chunks er fire fum cabin to cabin, all 'crost quarters. And sence dat day ole black folks been kindlin' fires fer Mister White Man off dat chunk dat Mister Jay stole and dat Mis' Swaller squench seven times.



“She run atter Mis’ Swaller wid a red-hot poker.”





VISITORS TO THE CABIN



“Sence de day Mis’ Swaller fust put fire in de hearth, she been lovin’ ter float round and in chimbleys, and folks des let her be free to buil’ her nes’ in chimbleys when she so please to do so.”



Visitors to the Cabin



AUNT PALINY’S grandboy had sore eyes.

It was necessary to learn at once what caused that complaint, and to know its cure. Awful suspicions about the cause were stirring in old Paliny’s breast, and needed confirmation. Almost every illness on a plantation is thought to come from being “hurted” or “conjured” by some neighbor with a grudge.

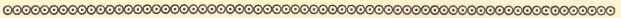
When Aunt Paliny spoke of sore eyes to Aunt Hester, Aunt Hester expressed anxiety about her sister’s girl, Luce, — for the “almonds” of Luce’s ears were “*down*.”

As one dark woman talked to another, it came about that there was thought to be in almost every cabin an ailment of some sort. In almost every family was felt the need of a diagnosis of some serious or long standing trouble, or cure of some already understood complaint.

Out of much talk of this nature grew the plan to send a



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



delegation of all the ailing ones, — those who were not “bed sick,” — to the cabin of Witch Menée far down in Dollyhyde Swamp.

It was a bold venture, for in all the memory of the Quarter, none had ever ventured to visit the cabin. The negroes had always waited with a record of their symptoms, well conned over and over at long rows of hoeing or plowing, until such time as Witch Menée or her daughter should come to them.

Then was the progress of the disease laid bare and the cure bought, or engaged to be brought for purchase, at the next visit to the settlement.

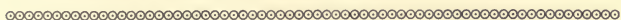
Matters now, however, were too serious for delay. The venture must be made.

Old Uncle Harkaway Turnipseed expressed a willingness to guide the delegation through the intricacies of the swamp, safe to the cabin. The delegation grew rapidly. Every child in the Quarter wanted to go to that enchanted land whence Menée’s child brought such wonderful legends. Nor was there one who could not complain of a “palate” that needed to be “lifted” or some such slight ailment.

The tying up of a palate-lock was such a small affair that any one could afford to pay the price for that; a good chew of tobacco, a bit of snuff in the bottom of a box, a slice of bacon, or even a pone of “fatty bread.”



VISITORS TO THE CABIN



On the day appointed for the visit, quite a crowd of small black or brown people moved to the swamp under the care of old Harkaway. It did not lessen the awe with which Witch Menée was already regarded that she did not vouchsafe to appear before the crowd when they reached her dwelling. She only consented to listen to the story of complaint, symptom, and attack, through the closed door, and give a diagnosis through the knot hole in that batten door. The cures were to be sent to the Quarter at a later day by her child.

The child herself, happy at seeing her acquaintances, and careless and unappreciative of the complete meagerness of her surroundings, even as compared with those to which her poor visitors were themselves accustomed, greeted them with gladness. She herself tied up palate-locks, and performed sundry and simple cures.

While Uncle Harkaway discoursed through the knot-hole with Witch Menée, the children pressed the busy little doctress for stories of her neighbors, the birds.

“Law-sy-massy me,” ventured one; “does birds sho’ nough talk?”

“I hears ’em,” sententiously declared the child.

“Does dey sho’ nough hold dey court, and have dey church, and quar’l, and dance, and den seek ’ligion?”

“I sees ’em,” assented the child.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Law-sy-massy me ! Jess, tell us 'bout it.”

With more pressing, for what artist does not need urging ere he exhibit his skill, the child told the story of



The Imitative Cat Bird

“ Po' Kin is Pesterin', fer Sho' ! ”



“ **P**O' kin is sech a pester ! De wo'se part is dat dey is des as good as you. Yit dey lag behine. Dey can't keep up wid de Leader of de flock. Den ever' time or so, you leadin' on wid yo' head helt high, heah come some critter fum de back of de band hollerin' at you : ‘ Is dat yo' cousin done fell in de ditch ? ’

“ Dar, you got ter go clean behine, ever' one you pass on de way back turnin' de head and smilin' a sorry smile. You gotter go clean behine and pull yo' kinfolks out de ditch.

“ Dat's de way wid Mister Mockin' Bird. Wid all he got State Rights now, which is mo' dan Free Papers uster be, yit he got po' kin. His po' kin do like y'all po' kin.

“ You know ef folks got a po', no 'count kinfolks-



THE IMITATIVE CAT BIRD



person, he gwine take er make mo' chance ter say 'Cousin' dan all de stout-in-money kin a pusson got. Meet up wid 'ems in de big road and hit's all time 'Cousin dis' an 'Cousin dat'! You may be clost kin to de Gov'ner-Big-Man hisse'f, and ef he meet you in de crowd he'll des give you yo' usual entitles, but heah come de Patch Elbow kin an hit's 'Cousin!' ever' time.

“Dat's de way wid Mister Mockin' Bird and Mister Cat Bird.

“Mister Cat Bird, him got no State Rights; him got nothin'. You watch him. He don't set hisse'f ter sing on de tip-top limb like Mister Mockin' Bird, 'caze den anybody could look and see he shorter built dan Mister Mockin' Bird, and he little diffunt color dan Mister Mockin' Bird.

“So Mister Cat Bird, he set hisse'f ter sing little far'r down in de tree, hid in de bushes ter mock de birds' notes and ter sing.

“Jedge Peacock hisse'f, he glance up say keerless like, like rich folks pass de 'howdeys' twixt deyse'ves, and he say :

Mornin', Mister Mockin' Bird,
Lightes' song I ever heard.

“Cat Bird, he swing and he jolly sing :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



'T ain't edzackly Mockin' Bird,
Dough it might er been ;
'T ain't dat very gempleum
But his clostest kin !

“Dat make Mister Mockin' Bird de maddes' !

“Jedge Peacock, he des chuckle to hisse'f, 'caze close or fur kin, Mister Cat Bird's name ter nairy bird's note ain't good, and Mister Mockin' Bird, his note good for all.

“Sometime when Mister Mockin' Bird git de mo'es' pestered 'bout 'Cousin dis' and 'Cousin dat,' he say to his po'-kin cousin: 'Le' 's take a light flight toge'her.'

“Dar! Dat don't s' good please Mister Cat Bird. 'Caze why ?

“Hit's des dis way: When dey bof gits dey wings spread fer dat light flight, hit's easy for ever' bird gwine ter see dat Mister Mockin' Bird wears a White Feather,—and Mister Cat Bird, he don't.

“So den ever' single bird know and sing it also :

Ef dem is kin,
Or uster been,
Why, den dey is
Des fur-off kin !

“Yas, po' kin is a pesterment any way you place it, and anyway you face it.”



“Set hisse’f ter sing.”



HOW HARM CAME TO MISTER BUZZARD



This visit to the cabin, deep in Dollyhyde Swamp, was too good an opportunity for hearing the stories of the birds in their own haunts not to be made the most of, so the children persuaded the willing raconteur to tell



How Harm Came to Mister Buzzard

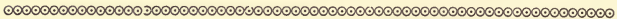


“**T**’ WAS when de fust folks was young dat Br’er Dog went back on de beasts and de varmints and took to hangin’ round peoples.

“Dey do say dat some days even now Br’er Dog gits sorry ’bout de way he behaved to his ole-time friends in de woods and de swamps. Dey say he sometimes has a turrible wrastlin’ of sperrit whe’r he best be tame or wile. Dey say one day he was so to’ up wid contention of mind dat he des conclude he’d go back to de woods and git him a holler tree to live in like he useter have befo’ he ’gun to chase his ole friends ’long wid Mister Man. He ran clean off from Mister Man’s house. Mister Man called him and whistled for him. Br’er Dog don’t pay no ’tention; des kept rockin’ ’long to de woods.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Mister Man, he say: ‘Nummine; you des gwine off to take a little rabbit-hunt by yo’self; you’ll be back ’fo’ long atter cook-vittles.’

“Br’er Dog, he ain’t sayin’ nothin’. He des rack ’long to de woods. D’rectly he come upon Br’er Rabbit’s track.

“He bark out loud. He so glad to come up so soon on one of his ole-time friends.

“Says he: ‘Br’er Rabbit, I done change ag’in; I gwine to be yo’ friend.’

“Says Br’er Rabbit: ‘Fer borrow or fer lend?’

“Same time Br’er Rabbit don’t tarry. He des skippin’ off as hard as he can go.

“Br’er Dog, he holler: ‘Please sah, stop, Br’er Rabbit. I done got wile ag’in.’

“Br’er Rabbit answer: ‘Yassah, and I got to run a mile ag’in.’

“Wid dat, Br’er Rabbit scoot clean out of sight.

“Br’er Dog, he sat down to study: How can a tame beast git wile ag’in if his ole friends won’t let him come nigh dem?

“D’rectly he spied Br’er Coon comin’ dat way. Br’er Coon, he haste to climb a tree, but he ’low anyhow he’ll soon hear Br’er Dog tellin’ Mister Man whar he be hidin’.



HOW HARM CAME TO MISTER BUZZARD



“ ‘Bow-wow!’ ’low Br’er Dog. He so glad he’s so nigh ’nother one of his ole friends.

“ Br’er Coon, he ’low : ‘Yes, tell Mister Man whar I be. Des so.’

“ Br’er Dog, he make answer : ‘No. Oh, no, no!’

“ Br’er Coon, he ’low : ‘Take keer, Br’er Dog, don’t come so near me.’

“ Br’er Dog, he ’low : ‘O Br’er Coon, if you des ’ud hear me.’

“ Br’er Coon, he say : ‘Well, Br’er Dog, le’ ’s wait twel de nex’ day.’

“ Br’er Dog, he whine :

O Br’er Coon, I please and pray!

I done get wile ag’in dis day.

“ Br’er Coon, he say :

Ah, Br’er Dog, you hunt us so hard when
you be tame

Dat us can’t trust you twel you do git lame.

“ Br’er Dog, he set to cryin’ ; whilst he wipe his eye,
Br’er Coon, he slip off.

“ D’rectly Br’er ’Possum, he come by.

“ Br’er Dog, he ’low : ‘ Br’er ’Possum, please come dis way.’



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

“ Br’er ’Possum, he don’t know what to say. He shuffle his foots. He grin. He say : ‘ Br’er Dog, I ain’t got no time to stay.’

“ Br’er Dog whine : ‘ Br’er ’Possum, I done got wile to-day.’

“ Wid dat, he come so clost to Br’er ’Possum dat Br’er ’Possum don’t know what to do, and so he des roll over laughin’, like he do twel yit when you ketch him.

“ Den Br’er Dog, he git mad, and he holler : ‘ Is you laughin’ at me?’

“ Br’er ’Possum, he say des as meek :

I des laugh at what I see.

Look at dat bee-martin in dat tree.

“ Time Br’er Dog turn to look, den Br’er ’Possum done gone.

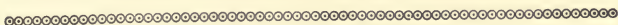
“ Den de word went round swift in de neighborhood dat Br’er Dog is actin’ mighty cu’us. He make like he gwine to come back to de ole country to settle, and he’s been livin’ in a clearin’ and eatin’ white folks’ vittles mo’ ’n forty-’leven years.

“ De beasts and de varmints shake dere heads and say : ‘ Watch out! Br’er Dog must have a mo’ dan usual cunnin’ notion in his head.’

“ Dey all gits mo’ feared of Br’er Dog dan dey was befo’. No beast would confab wid him. Bear, wolf, fox, dey



HOW HARM CAME TO MISTER BUZZARD



all run soon as dey ketch de fust note of Br'er Dog's 'Howdye.'

"Br'er Dog run so far dis way and dat, tryin' to find somebody to speak friendly wid him dat he mos' wo' out. He come to a sandy stretch of road between two broom-sedge fields and dar he lay down to rest. He lie still.

"D'rectly a shadow fell 'crost his nose.

"He lie so still.

"D'rectly shadow fell 'crost his ear.

"'T was Br'er Buzzard flyin' round. He spy Br'er Dog as he lie so still and he think he dead. He was drawin' in de scrope of his wings; he comin' closter to Br'er Dog. He lit on de limb of a tree; he twist his head dis way and dat way. He was a pretty critter dem days. He had a fine plume sweepin' from de top of his head mo' beautifuller dan dat de woodpecker wears now.

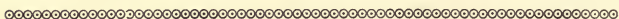
"Br'er Dog, he lie so still dat Br'er Buzzard thinks he sho' be dead. Yit he 'low 't would 'lieve his mind if Br'er Dog would shet dat eye. Br'er Dog don't wink a eyelash.

"Br'er Buzzard, he hop dis way and dat way. He 'low, 'Why 'n' Br'er Dog shet dat eye ef he do be dead?'

"Den Br'er Dog, he git mad sho' 'nough. All his ole-time friends done fall out wid him, and now Br'er Buzzard



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



think he do be dead. Br'er Buzzard 'low: ' He must er be dead!' Wid dat, he hop on Br'er Dog's back, he tuck a firm hole wid his claws and give sech a nab at Br'er Dog's back!

"Den Br'er Dog, he make a grab at Br'er Buzzard's head. Little more 'n' he'd a-took Br'er Buzzard's head clean off. He did take off dat wavin' plume and left his head bare and bal', like you see it now. Po' Br'er Buzzard was off from dar mo' swifter dan he ever was befo'. He little mo' 'n escaped wid his life.

"Since dat day Buzzard don't never miss fust pickin' out de eye of ev'ything dat he gwine eat."

The smell of the marshes swept about the cabin and perhaps suggested to the story-teller, anxious to entertain fitly her first visitors, the story of



Crane



"CRANE look lak white folks, but he sho' ac' like a nigger. When white folks sees a fun'al, dey ac's nice and decent, but des watch how a nigger do. Time he see de hearse, he begin ter holler, 'Who daid? Law-sy-



CRANE



massy me! Ain't folks dyin' up fas'? Who dat daid? When'd he die? What ail him? Whar gwine bu'y him? When gwine hab's fun'al? Who gwine preach his fun'al? Did he die happy? Did he die hard? Who daid?'

"Crane uster ac' des dat niggerish way. Crane al'a's did live way down in de swamp and de marsh, lak he do now; but den he wa'n't no sech awk'ard thing as he is now.

"He didn't have no sech a long neck.

"He didn't have no sech a long legs.

"But dose days, time he hear de bell tone, nummine whe'r hit tone over to Hick'ry Stand Church, or Bethel, or Frog Level, nummine what Crane be doin', or fishin' or not, he stick his head up out de marsh grass, and he holler,

"'Who daid? When'd he die? What did ail him? Did he die hard? Whar gwine bu'y him? Who gwine preach his fun'al? What'd he lef'? Who dat daid?'

"'T was a plum scandal de way Crane done. Ever' time de bell tone, he riz up in the marsh grass, and he tiptoe, higher, higher, higher — see ef he can't see who dat daid.

"'T wa'n't no gre't while 'fo' he growed to be des dat way, legs longer and higher, and longer and higher; neck longer and higher, longer and higher. He is des dat way twel yit. And dat de way he al'a's gwine ter be.

"He know all about dyin' now, he do. 'Caze fer de longes' he did n't study 'bout nothin' else. O me! He



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



know now, he do, when folks is gwine ter die, let 'lone be done daid. Ef you see him fly over de comb of de roof of a house, him callin' down,

Corpse! Corpse! Corpse!

dar's mo' 'n apt ter be a corpse in dat house dis year, or de nex' — or clost on."

Uncle Harkaway was ready to lead his band back to the Quarter, but the children pleaded for just time enough to hear the tale of



Br'er Hawk and Br'er Buzzard



“**D**ON'T nobody know what started de quar'l, but dem two been peckin' at one y'o'her fer the longes',— Br'er Hawk and Br'er Buzzard.

“One time Br'er Hawk little mo' 'n liketer had Br'er Buzzard.

“He had him in a close place.

“He done find ole Br'er Buzzard gwine his rounds of ev'ybody's fiel' and bank, and he done tole him inter de foot of de osage-orange hedge and got him pounded dar.

“Br'er Buzzard, he's a mighty free-movin' bird, and he



“ ‘ Who dat daid ? When ’ d he die ? ’ ”



BR'ER HAWK AND BR'ER BUZZARD

wanter git outer dar. Br'er Hawk, he set and watch him. Br'er Buzzard, he peer out de briars, he hop on dis foot, he hop on dat, but he can't s' much as flop airy wing.

“ Br'er Hawk, he set and watch ; he say :

Br'er Buzzard, you vow you 'vide wid me,
But you is done it, I don't see !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he riz one shouljer, he aidge fur'r in de briars, — he bout ter spy and pry a way thoo, — he say :

Um-um, Br'er Hawk. O-ho,
I tell you dat to-morrow !

“ But Br'er Hawk, he see Br'er Buzzard was 'bout ter ac' cunnin' and git off, and he des in time ter catch him by de tail. Br'er Buzzard, he stop des as still. He study. What is he gwine do now ?

“ Br'er Hawk, he mad. He been layin' and watchin' and dartin' fer Br'er Buzzard all dis time and now Br'er Buzzard 'bout ter slip off.

“ Br'er Hawk, git madder. He snatch up fust thing he can retch, a briary stick, he do, and he 'gin ter lam on Br'er Buzzard's tail ; dat all he can git a holt on. Br'er Buzzard done mos' slip thoo de hedge.

“ Dar. Br'er Buzzard done suffer fer Cap'n Sparrer ter hit his hat out his hand, leave him bareheaded. Done let



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Br'er Dog make him bal'headed. He 's a misfortunate critter. He study now 'bout he can't 'scape scarce wid his life, and he study he sho' gwine los' all his tail feathers.

“ He stay right still, and he study.

“ Br'er Hawk yit lammin' wid de briary stick, but he so mad dat he done los' de keen sight of his eyes, — yit he keep on lammin' on Br'er Buzzard's tail feathers.

“ Br'er Buzzard mighty bothered. He say :

Br'er Hawk, you 'hind me, you,
What is yer tryin' to do ?

“ Br'er Hawk lam harder. He say :

I'll show you what I try to do ;
I'll show you I can do it, too !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he gittin' mighty uneasy. He say :

O Br'er Hawk. O-ho,
Is you lammin' my tail for sho' ?
O no ! O no !

“ Br'er Hawk, he git madder. He beat harder. He say :

Yas, I is lammin' yo' tail,
And I reckon I got you in jail !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he ax :

Br'er Hawk, please, sah, you tell me,
Is you beatin' blood out my feathers, see ?



BR'ER HAWK AND BR'ER BUZZARD

“ Br'er Hawk, he git anxious now. He feared he ain't hurtin' Br'er Buzzard sho' 'nough. He say :

Hit don't yit 'pear like I am,
But I will, — Plam ! Plam !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he see one chanct and des one ; he up and speak ag'in :

Br'er Hawk, you got me this time sho',
But yit, Br'er Hawk, I wants to *know*
Won't you des step out dis heah hedge,
Won't you des go ter yond' wood edge,
Git dat yonder light wood knot,
Dat I see on yonder spot,
Lam my feathers wid it — so,
Den, ef you hit me, I will know —
O—ho ! O—ho !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he groan so 'stressious dat Br'er Hawk b'lieve he is 'bout dyin' and can't slip off, so he go to de wood edge, fer he 'low when he git dat light wood knot, he 'll hit so hard Br'er Buzzard bound ter feel it.

“ Um-hum ! When he git back, Br'er Buzzard gone.

“ Br'er Hawk ain't got Br'er Buzzard pounded no mo' neither.”

As the story was finished a black child pointed to where, deeper in the swamp, a little bird was scratching in a



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

heap of fallen leaves, throwing the leaves this way, that way, — industrious little bird :

“ Hit ’s Scratchin’ Billy,” explained Jess. “ Some folks call him Swamp Robin.”

As the children noted that Uncle Harkaway was still conversing through the knot-hole, they asked Jess for a story of the



Swamp Robin



“ **T** WAS dis way wid de Scratchin’ Billy : He lives down in de swamp. Any day I can see him heah whilst de y’o’her birds is singin’ and wingin’ and flyin’ and gwine on, — him just scratchin’, scratchin’, scratchin’ fer a livin’.

“ All de y’o’her birds des havin’ dey frolic and dey fun. Um-hum. Not him. He down on some bed of dry leaves des flingin’ leaves dis way, swingin’ leaves dat way, not singin’ ’t all.

“ Bluebird pass by — got on dat slick new spring suit ; he sing out :

Can’t you sing, my brother ?

Which you not or ruther

Sing ! Sing ! Sing !



SWAMP ROBIN



“ Scratchin’ Billy he don’t say nothin’, he des fling leaves dis way, fling ’em dat way wid his foots.

“ Sis’ Dove fly by. She stop her flight and sing ter him :

Ain’t you got no fiel’,
Ripe corn to yiel’,
Dat yer gotter work so,
Work so — so — so —
O — o — o ?

“ Partridge she come by wid a whirr. She fat ’n’ sassy ; she chuckle :

Who say I steal
In Sis’ Dove fiel’ ?
Corn ripe ?
Not quite,
But yer mighty right.
I won’t ! I don’t
Work so !

“ Ever’ bird as dey pass by has dey laugh at de Scratchin’ Billy.

“ But pretty soon de dry time come. De hot time come. Corn all in Mister Man’s crib. De spring branch slow. Bluebird got no time ter sing ; he busy payin’ on dat debt he don’t never git paid. Dove she done starve in her own fiel’. Partridge she done got too fat off pickin’ an’ stealin’ even ter whistle. Nairy a bird got heart ter sing.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Up mount de Scratchin’ Billy! Up in de highes’ tree. His singin’ falls dis way, falls dat way. Sweetes’ singin’ uv all de year!

“Hey-yeh! He’s Swamp Robin now. Folks dat did n’t know him when he was des scratchin’, scratchin’, scratchin’ in de leaves — Scratchin’ Billy den — dey know him now!

“Hey-yeh! He Mister Swamp Robin now. Sweetes’ singer in de singin’ choir.”



The Visit Returned



AS promised by Witch Menée, her daughter soon visited the settlement of which the ruined old “Great House” was the centre, bearing with her the cures for the many visitors who had sought the cabin in the swamp for advice and remedy.

Aunt Paliny’s grandboy was told to “’n’int his sore eyes with calf slobber,” twice each day; to be at the milking-pen at the milking of the cows at morning and evening for that purpose until cured.

The “almonds” of Luce’s ears were to be rubbed up by some person standing behind her, rubbing up evenly with both hands, palms spread, the fingers of each hand



THE VISIT RETURNED



dipped for the rubbing in an unguent of black hen-fat and soot.

The long, lank boy who suffered in spring-time with spells of "hilarious chills and terrifus fever" was told to go on the next full moonlight night to a blossoming dog-wood tree; he must find one far in the swamp, not to be found probably by any other, and "just at de turn er de night" he must tie a white cotton string about that tree trunk. He would tie the chills there. They would trouble him no more.

So, through a long list of ills and remedies, the child progressed while already the children of the Quarter were crowding about her to beg for the fulfilment of her promise at the swamp cabin of more stories of the birds.

Witch Menée's daughter prepared to redeem her promise. She sat, a little bronze figure against the white fluted column above the broken steps of the mansion, her legs straight out before her, her black toes pointing straight up, her black head silhouetted against the gleaming pillar.

The eager crowd of old and young of the Quarter were gathered about her to listen to her stories and to augment them with many another quaint legend, aphorism, or song, brought to mind by the raconteur's flowing store of lore.

She told the story of




PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



The Mocking Bird

Why He Stays at Home



“**I**s dat a whip-po'-will hollerin' out dar dis broad day-time?”

So Jess introduced her story: “Sho', I mought er knowed no whip-po'-will gwine be heah dis time er de year. Dat's nobody 'tall but ole Mister Mockin' Bird.

“La! La! I hear my mammy say secu'ity debt ruint her ole massa, and hit gwine ruin ev'ybody dat write dey name ter y' other folks owin' — dat's sho'. I heah Unc' Darby say las' time I was heah dat he glad he can't write lak dese uppity free niggers, what ain't had de rock bottom cotton-'n'-corn sense whipped inter 'em.

“But dat's des what Mister Mockin' Bird done. He des put his name to any and airy and all de birds' notes — des scanjelous.

“You can hear him: ‘Peep-peep,’ lak a young chicken.

“Den hit's: ‘Tir-a-lee! Tir-a-lee!’ lak a bluebird.

“Hit's: ‘Pay! Pay! Pay me!’ lak a sparrer.

“Hit's: ‘Laziness kill you!’ lak a lark.



THE MOCKING BIRD



“Den hit’s: ‘Chip-out-er-white-oak!’ lak a chuck-will’s widder.

“I is done hearn him right at our do’: ‘Bob White! Bob White!’ same as a partridge. Dat’s skeery, fer hit’s a death sign fer a partridge to call nigh a house; but when I jump up, mammy tell me: ‘Look out de do’ ter see dat partridge,’ who hit be but Mister Mockin’ Bird.

“In de fust times, I hear mammy say when ev’y stump had a pot er gole bu’y’d under hit, Mister Mockin’ Bird, he sign up notes reckless.

“Sah! He take up any and all birds’ notes, dat he did!

“Well, he’s yit keepin’ up de interes’ in dem notes, — he is!

“All de birds, dey can take a holiday. One goes off ter stay in de high mountains, t’ other go whar dey say de sea is. Ev’y bird mos’ go somewheres.

“Mister Mockin’ Bird, he study ’bout he’d like to see de worl’ also; but den de law hole him close ter de sound of de Court House Bell. All he kin do is des ter keep up de interes’ in all dem notes.

“Round-trip-cheap and ’scussion on de railroad train ain’t no good ter him.

“But den he wo’f s’ much ter de State, and de law hole him heah so fas’, dat de State done insu’ his life and hit’ll cos’ a man five dollar ter kill him.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ He say he don’t s’ much keer.

“ He say de rovin’ bird don’t have his life insu’ance paid fer him. He skip lightly. He sing lively. He de impudentes’ bird dar is. Happy and singin’ all day long and ev’y night, too.”

The story of Mister Mocking Bird’s unwise friendliness to all the needy, having been told, Jess was urged to tell the story of



How Come Br’er Buzzard Boards



“ **A**LL dem birds dey has a nest,
’Cept it is des one.

He ’d like to have a place to rest,
But den he ain’t got none.

“ Ev’y bird do have its nest but one. Fust times de nests was hung on a haw-hedge, rows and rows of dem, same lak new bonnets to pick and choose from.

“ De birds des flock dar. Fust come, fust choose.

“ Fust man come de Buzzard, but he would n’t choose none. He hard to suit. He step, a-hop, a-hop, ker-flop, to de row of nests. He say :



“He . . . don’t s’ much keer.”



HOW COME BR'ER BUZZARD BOARDS



No, thank yer ! None !

Not one ! Not one !

“ He stick his big head in de softest, prettiest one. He look at it wid one eye, den t' other :

You call dis good, — do you ?

I don't ! fer true ! fer true !

“ But de t' other birds all j'ined together :

Yes ! Yes ! Yes ! Yes !

Very nice nes' !

“ So de humming-bird fly up so still, so swif', and she choose and carry off dat nes'. Den dar was 'nother nes' hangin', rockin' like a cradle. What ole Buzzard do but laugh :

Haw ! haw ! haw !

Caw ! caw ! caw !

“ Oriole come by. What 's de matter, Br'er Buzzard ?

Haw ! haw ! haw !

I laugh at de funniest nes' I ever saw.

“ Oriole don't mind Br'er Buzzard laughin' ; she know a good nes' when she see it ; and so off she flew wid dat nes'.

“ Den de thrush come to de haw-tree, and dar on de



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

topmost limb, thrush see a nes' big at de top and slopin' to most nothin' at de bottom. She set to singin' :

A pretty nes' !
De very bes' !

“ Buzzard croak out :

Pretty house ? Pretty house ?
'T ain't fitten fer a mouse !

“ Thrush des content and sing on :

Maybe ! maybe ! maybe !
Yit it suit me ! suit me ! suit me !

“ So thrush flew off wid dat nes' and twel yet it suit her and her folks.

“ So through and through, in and through, 'mong de birds it went pick and choose twel all was fit and suit, and heah pretty late come de mockin' bird. She find des a rough-lookin' nes' like a bundle of sticks still hangin' on de haw-tree.

“ Buzzard laugh when he see de mockin' bird lookin' at it. He croak :

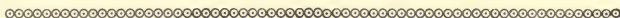
Dat's des a bundle of sticks —

Dat's in a mighty po' fix.

I could knock dat to pieces in des two licks.



HOW COME BR'ER BUZZARD BOARDS



“ Mockin' bird sing :

Hey ! how come you laugh so ?

Laugh so !

Oh-ho !

Laugh so !

Oh-ho !

“ Buzzard croak ag'in :

I laugh at dat home,

I ruther had roam,

Dan live in sech home !

“ But de mockin' bird still sing :

O no ! O no ! O no !

Don't say so ! Don't say so !

“ Den off she flew wid dat nes', and dough it de last of de lot, and mighty rough, she made it de sweetest home of all, wid her sweet singin'.

“ Den, 'caze of Br'er Buzzard's bein' so tur'ble hard to suit, all de birds set to singin' :

O ! O ! O ! O !

You let de time pass !

Dat was de las' !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he be de mo'est sorry, but he make out like he don't keer. He go and sit on top rail of de



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



fence. Twel yit he love to set dar. Twel yit he got no nes'. Twel yit he got no place to res'. He ain't got no place fer home. He 'bleeged ter roam. Ev'y day his wings git stronger. Ev'y day his journeys git longer. He wisht he had choosed a home. When you see him way up yonder gwine, — des so :

See-saw ! See-saw !

'way up 'g'inst de sky, he's lookin' fer a home right den — lookin' de worl' over fer a home. When a rainy day come, de buzzards all set in a row on de ole rail fence, and de fust one says to de next one :

I 'm gwine to build me a house
In de mornin' :

“ T' other one say to de y' other one :

I 'm gwine to build me a house
In de mornin' !

“ Ev'y Buzzard turns to de nex' one all down de line, and ev'y one says to de y' other :

I 'm gwine to build me a house
In de mornin' !

“ But watch 'em next mornin' when de sun come out bright. Dar dey is, all de Buzzard fambly, see-sawin' up in de highest sky. Dey so used to roamin' dat dey can't



THE GOOSE



settle down. Dey sails in de highest sunshine, and ev'y one says to de nex' one :

Dis is better 'n any house !

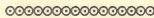
Dis is better 'n any house !

“ De Buzzard fambly all holds to dis good day dat it is better to board dan to bother—dat is, when de sun shine.”



The Goose

Why Some Are Tame and Some Are Wild



“ **M**ISTER MAN done catch and pen 'em all in de fust days. All was des 'like den ; none was wile geeses ; all was tame geeses. But la ! You know how 't is, — some folks even in one fambly is diffunt kind ; hit 's dat way wid kin and cousins. Wile bird smell de woods in de white folks' garden, and dat 's de way 't was wid some of de geeses.

“ Some stood de stuffin' and got stout.

“ Some pine in de pen and got po'.

“ Tame Goose say ter his feller :

Why 'n' yer eat ? Why 'n' yer eat ?

“ Wile Goose squawk back :

I 'm tired walkin' on my feet !



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Tame Goose holler :

Don't you know
You can't go
No far'r dan pen?
Be easy, den !

“Wile Goose holler back :

My wings are tired a-lyin',
I wanter be flyin',
'T ain't no use a-tryin'
Ter be suited heah !

“Tame Goose chuckle :

Mister Man need you,
Mister Man feed you,
Good, good, so good !

“Wile Goose whimper back :

Don't he kill you
When he fill you?
Bad, bad, so bad !

Tame Goose call :

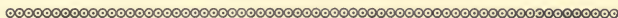
If you go he'll shoot you !
Den will dat suit you ?



“ If you go, he'll shoot you ! Den will dat suit you ? ”



THE GOOSE



“ Wile Goose call :

Quack, quack ! I ’m gwine,
I ’ll die tryin’ !
My wings are flyin’ !

“ Tame Goose holler :

You ’d better stay !
It ’s cole to-day !
Don’t fly away !

“ Wile Goose rise on de wing, and holler :

Foller yo’ leader !
To warmer wedder
We ’ll seek or whedder
We find or no —
Foller yo’ leader !

“ And up dey riz — a good half er Mister Man’s flock what he done pen. Nummine. Dey ’bleeged ter fly high sence den, fer ter try ter git missed of dem shots Mister Man send atter dem. Dey fly dis way and dat, gwine ter seek warmer wedder. Dey all sence dat day ’bleeged ter foller dere Leader.

“ See ’em now when dey flies over : Dey are spread one line so, t’ other line so, shape of a flat-iron on de sky, de Leader in de foremos’ p’int, des in front of de band.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Mister Man been settin’ mo’ and mo’ sto’ by dem what stayed. Done made Tame Goose his Night Watchman, give him de run of ev’ything.”

When Jess had finished the story of how the geese had reached the parting of the ways, a dusky little brat asked :

“Ain’t dar no tale ’bout crows?”

For to the darky mind the crow is just about as near human as a bird can be. He just misses, according to their belief, the gift of speech.

“Dar’s a many a one,” declared Jess; “and dey all is true, too.”

And to prove the truth of her assertion, she told the story of



How Preacher Crow Makes a Start Toward Being a Vegetarian



“**D**EY useter flock to Mis’ Susan’s. Dey all wo’ dey Sunday blacks. Dey set round de house, ev’y one talkin’ at de same time, and eatin’ all dey kin git, same as a lot er nigger preachers does now. Look like dey kep’



PREACHER CROW A VEGETARIAN



de count of Mis' Susan's settin' of ev'y hen she had, fer des soon as a brood git fryin' size, heah dey come, — ev'y Preacher Crow.

“Nex' brood git good feathered, it was de same thing. Den heah come a reg'lar gadderin' of 'em all, same as a 'vival and camp-meetin' also.

“Dat time dey des bodaciously eat Mis' Susan out. Dey eat her clean *out*. Dar was nothin' 't all lef' in dat po'try yard, but one ole, po' rooster, and one ole drake, and one skinny guinea-hen. Dem three run off and hid. Dey would n't come back fer no callin'.

“When all de Preacher Crows seed dat de po'try yard was des teetotal cleaned out, den dey all lef' de settlement fer a season.

“De news dat dey done gone, come down to de rooster and de drake and de guinea, and den all de three of 'em come back to Mis' Susan's house.

“Time dey get back, de rooster he so glad ter get de house clean er comp'ny onct mo' dat he mount a block at de front do' and clap his wings and crow :

Preachers all gone !

Preachers all gone !

“But twel yit if a rooster crow at de front do' hit's a sign of parlor comp'ny.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Sho’ ’nough, de guinea hen flew on de fence and peeped down de road; she see a little cloud of dust.

“ Rooster crow and flap and crow :

Preachers all gone !

Preachers all gone !

“ Guinea on de fence holler :

Not quite ! Not quite ! Not quite !

“ De drake, he peep thoo’ de bottom rails of de fence ; he see thoo de dust ; he shake his head and he whisper :

Hit ’s a preacher ! Hit ’s a preacher !

“ Dey was all three of ’em, de rooster, de guinea, de drake, off ter de woods ag’in.

“ Hit took Mis’ Susan so long to git a relay to her po’try yard dat de Preacher Crows sorter cease ter ’spec’ ter git dey fried chicken regular, and dey ’gun ter git a taste fer fraish new corn.”

When this story had been commented on, Jess shook her head wisely : “ Des ’bout time Mis’ Susan did git a relay, some ’un happen ter send Preacher Crow back to de corn patch.”

When urged to tell what had happened, she related the story of



“Dar was nothin’ ’t all lef’ in dat po’try yard, but one ole, po’ rooster, and one ole drake, and one skinny guinea-hen.”



HAWK'S DISGUISE



Hawk's Disguise



“**D**AT time de whole camp’een er crows come on Mis’ Susan and eat her po’try yard clean, ’t was by de hardes’ dat she got a start ag’in. De Preacher Crows was in de corn patch, but dey was keepin’ a watch sorter on her po’try yard ter see how she git on. Des lyin’ low and sayin’ nothin’ dey was, and chucklin’ in dey throats ’bout ev’ything in dat po’try yard was comin’ ’long fine. Dey was des gwine wait a little longer ter let dem young chickens grow little mo’.

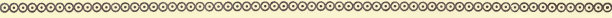
“ But whilst dey waitin’, ole Br’er Hawk, he got hongry, he did. He got so hongry, he did, dat he come pryin’ ’round Mis’ Susan’s yard ter see can he git one er his ole-time dry crusts.

“ He settin’ on a dead tree, edge er de woods-lot. He settin’ and studyin’. He study will de patter-roller git at him now sence he done get so wile. He dunno.

“ D’rectly he see Mis’ Chimibly Swaller gwine in de chimibly. In and out! In and out! Up and down! Up and down! Hit hard ter git a word wid Mis’ Swaller, she so swift; but Br’er Hawk he make out to pass de howdys. Den he ’low:



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Sis' Swaller, you black as a crow,
You is, fer sho'.
But you ain't tuck ter preachin'
And teachin'?

“Sis' Swaller flash about in and out, in and out, up and down, round and round; she say:

No, no, no!

(Des so)

I'll sweep your chimbly out

Fer des a half a dollar!

Half-a-dollar!

R-r-r-route!

I'll sweep yer chimbly out

Fer des a half a dollar!

“Br'er Hawk draw his eye down. He set blinkin' and thinkin.' He study:

Ef a man git missed of his own job and pay,

He might try 'nother des a day!

“So while Sis' Swaller dash out, he dart in. 'Caze he gwine try can he make dat half a dollar.

“Wile, free bird lak him in de chimbly!

“Hit little mo' 'n' kilt him!

“De way he roll round and round and down dat chimbly.



HAWK'S DISGUISE

“T wa' n't no 'in and out' wid him. He roll clean ter de bottom, he did, and out at de fire hole, and clean half crost de flo'. Little mo' 'n' he did make out ter fetch hisse'f up and git on ter a cheer and set down.

“ He set and study.

“ He draw his eye down; he set thinkin' and blinkin'. Mis' Susan, she so 'stonish' she don't know what ter say. D'rectly she fetch her voice ter say:

Mornin', how do!

Mornin', who you?

“ Mis' Susan's chillen make a gre't 'miration. Dey say:

Is dat Preacher Crow?

Is dat him? Yes or no?

“ Br'er Hawk, he draw his eye down. He done study up a way. He say:

Chillen, don't you know

Good Preacher Crow?

“ Mis' Susan, she say:

La! Br'er Crow,

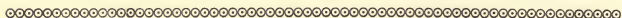
I did n't know!

But you mighty thin,—

Thinner 'n you is been.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Br’er Hawk, he say :

’Caze er dat, dough,
Is I ain’t had no
Fried chickens !

“ Br’er Hawk, he try ter draw in de slack of his voice when he say chicken ! But he had a hard time wid tryin’, fer dat’s Br’er Hawk’s own holler and word : Chicken !

“ Mis’ Susan, she say :

Dat sound lak de voice er Br’er Hawk,
But, Mister Crow, you would n’t mock,
Even in yo’ talk,
No sech bad man as Br’er Hawk ?

“ Br’er Hawk, he draw his eye down ; he say :

No, no, no, no ;
Ain’t I black as a crow ?

“ Mis’ Susan, she look at him right clost ; she say :

Fer a fac’,
You is black !

“ She ’bleeged ter b’lieve him den, and she tole her chillen : ‘ Go bring in a lot er de fryin’ size.’

“ When Br’er Hawk hear de scufflin’ and runnin’ and hollerin’ at dem chickens in dat po’try yard, he had a to-do



HAWK'S DISGUISE

wid hisse'f not ter start and dart out and snatch and catch wid 'em. But he set still, he draw his eye down.

“ Mis' Susan, she done speak de name of Br'er Hawk and now she can't stop off. She 'buse Br'er Hawk good. She 'fuse ter speak a good word fer him.

“ Br'er Hawk, he set still and listen, he do. He draw his eye down.

“ 'T wa'n't long 'fo' de fried chicken 'gun ter come in. La! did n't he eat den! But whilst he eatin', he say ter hisse'f:

La! Ef dis was raw
Could n't I mo' work my jaw!

“ Mis' Susan, she say :

I don't not know
What you say, Br'er Crow.

“ Br'er Hawk, he make ansah :

Sister, I des listen ter yo' talk
'Bout how bad is Br'er Hawk.

“ Br'er Hawk eat his fill dat day. He clean up ev'y dish dat come. He eat ev'y piece offen de dish.

“ De po'try yard was bodacious clean up ag'in.

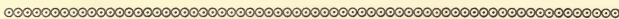
“ Des den, heah come de whole flock er crows.

“ Br'er Hawk, he hearn 'em comin'.

“ Wa'n't he skeered den!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Out de do’ he darted.

“ Did n ’t he flew !

“ All de crows seed him.

“ Dey know him, too, if he was soot black.

“ Ev’y crow set ter hollerin’ at him :

Hawk ! Hawk ! Hawk ! Hawk !

“ Dough Br’er Hawk was good skeered up, he made out ter holler back one time :

Plenty er chicken !

Chicken !

Chicken !

“ Den he was off ter de wile woods ter lay clost and hide.

“ Dem Crows seed ’t wa’n’t no use to lay round Mis’ Susan’s house now fryin’ size all gone. Dey was off in a flock ag’in ter de corn patch atter fraish green corn. Dey dar twel yit. De whole flock pecking up fraish corn.

“ A neighbor ’oman tell Mis’ Susan dat she oughter put a flint rock in de fire-place ever’ time she set a hen. ’Caze if you keep a flint rock in de fire-hearth whilst de brood is hatchin’, dat brood ’ll be safe from Br’er Hawk.”



EARLY



Early



THE first whiteness of day-coming swept in waves through the gray of the morning. Every blade of grass held ten times its weight of dew and bent under while it strengthened with the crystal wealth it bore.

Long wreaths of mist, white in uprising as a snow-cloud in its falling, exhaled pallor from each slow rivulet that wetted all the world of fields and wood.

Pallid and white, like spirits of the departed night hours, the diaphanous mist wreaths rose and rose and rose, and somewhere above the upper edges of the forest vanished.

The short-lived energy of the summer morning was setting all the Quarter astir.

Yawning women came out of the one-room cabins with milking buckets and sought the cows.

The eager calves were turned out from close corners, or turned in from nosing about the rails of the pens.

Smoke wreaths ascended from every cabin chimney, while on the hearths below, the ash-cake was dropped into the ashes, and the skillet was put on to heat.

Every man in the Quarter went to feed his mule, and the day's work had begun.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



An hour or two of this slow, improvident labor would, with help of ever-generous Nature, feed all mouths and provide the scant clothing needed.

When the women had taken up the work of patching and washing the poor incongruous garments of the cabin households, and when groups of children were out on the open fields at "minding" the cows, Witch Menée's daughter appeared at the Quarter. It was an unusual time for her to come, this busy time, if such slow motion, such small tasks, can constitute an idea of business.

But to-day she had brought the leaves of that rare,—in that locality,—plant, Rattle Snake's Master. The leaves of this, bruised and laid over the bite of that most venomous serpent of the Southern thickets, would unfailingly "draw out de pizen."

These leaves were in demand in the lush time of the year, when the rattle-snake, bestirring himself from his winter lethargy, was alert to strike.

These leaves were bought eagerly by the plow hands, and by the wood-clearers before they left for their morning's work. It was well, when at work in over-grown fields and new ground places where was the possible den of the rattle-snake, to be supplied with this antidote to his venom.

As Jess sat,—her leaves readily sold,—by Aunt Heartless'



HAWK'S FUST QUARRY



wash tub, listening to the gossip of the Quarter, the children from the edges of the wild grass plots, where they watched the cows at their grazing, spied her.

In spite of rebuking cries from the mothers, seated in the cabin doors at patching, the children came in from all sides to gather about the Swamp Child.

They wished to entice from her lips and to enjoy the news and gossip of the wild woods.

They listened to her stories ; and between each tale they darted to the field edge, where the cows they had left off "minding" would make depredation on the growing crops.

Jess, having excited in the breasts of the children an interest in that hero of bird lore, the cunning hawk, now told the story of



Hawk's Fust Quarry



"**M**ISTER HAWK, he did n't useter work hard for a livin' lak he do now. Times is change' fer all folks and critters since Coun' Surrender, my mammy tells me.

"Hawk useter be des a prank-playin' critter, des lively and likely and do nothin'.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

“ But when he git mo’ ageable, he git mo’ sense-minded. He wisht also dat he had stayed partners wid Br’er Buzzard lak in de ole folks’ song :

Hawk and de Buzzard went ter de Nor’,
’T ain’t gwine rain no mo’!
Buzzard come back wid a broken jaw —
’T ain’t gwine rain no mo’.

“ But dem two done split up bein’ partners long ago.

“ Br’er Buzzard livin’ on de State’s money now, and Br’er Hawk, he yit pickin’ and stealin’ and livin’ by de hardes’.

“ Hit’s hard but hit’s fair.

“ Way off in de hills, ole Mis’ Hawk settin’ on a rock. Mister Hawk, he holler to her :

Dry bread ain’t greasy !

“ Mis’ Hawk, she holler ter him :

Hard work ain’t easy !

“ Des den ole Br’er Rabbit, he scoot by ; he say ter Br’er Hawk :

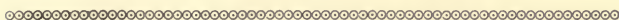
What make you ’n’ old Buzzard part,
Why ’n’ you foller his meat cart ?

“ Br’er Hawk, he git mad at Br’er Rabbit den ; he dart atter him ; he holler :

’T ain’t none er yo’ business !



HAWK'S FUST QUARRY



“ Br’er Rabbit, he lit out faster, he did, but he holler back :

Br’er Buzzard’s eatin’ mighty rank,
He’s pickin’ bones on dat ditch bank !

“ Br’er Hawk, he dart down on Br’er Rabbit, but he missed him. Br’er Hawk, he good mad now ; he holler :

I is tired er dry crust,
I ’low I ’ll pick yo’ bones fust !

“ Br’er Rabbit, he seen Br’er Hawk mean des what he say and he lit out. De fiel’ was wide and de fiel’ was clean, and fur ner nigh Br’er Rabbit could n’t see nairy bit er briar patch. But he keep on,— hop, skip, jump, run. Br’er Hawk, he dartin’ behind him, hollerin’ :

I ’m is tired er dry crust !
I lay I ’ll pick yo’ bones fust !

“ Br’er Rabbit, he nighin’ de woods. He go clippity, clippity, clippity ! He see a holler tree on de wood edge and he makin’ fer it. He nigh ’bout wo’ out. But he ’bleeged ter jeer at Br’er Hawk. He holler back :

Who dat went to de law ?
Who broke Br’er Buzzard’s jaw ?

“ Br’er Hawk, he dart at him. In de holler tree, Br’er Rabbit go. Dar ! He find de way in. But whar de way



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



out? Br'er Hawk, he set and watch dat hole. Ever' time or so, he shriek out :

I 'low I pick yo' bones fust !

“ Br'er Rabbit, he skeered, but he impident ; he holler :

Dough I is fat,
You ain't gwine do dat.

“ But turn round as he do turn, he can't find no way out dat holler but de way he went in, and Br'er Hawk, he 's watchin' dat. Br'er Hawk, he set still and watch. Br'er Rabbit say :

Br'er Hawk, ef you need go away,
I promise you right heah I stay.

“ Br'er Rabbit, he a cunnin' man, but Br'er Hawk, he cunnin' too. He say :

I bound you do,
You talkin' true,
But I no need to go,
Oh, no !

“ Dey wait and dey watch, bof un 'em. D'rectly Br'er Hawk minded he gotter go sho' 'nough fer ter glance over de po'try yards, and he dart down and pick up a light 'ood knot lycin' by and put hit in de hole.

“ Dar now !



“Br’er Rabbit, he lit out.”



HAWK'S FUST QUARRY

“Dar is des room lef’ fer Br’er Rabbit’s eye to peep out, and des one eye at de time at dat.

“Br’er Hawk, he say :

To-morrer come, you
Look fer me, too.

“Off he flew.

“To-morrer heah he come, sho’ ’nough. He call at de hole :

Br’er Rabbit, you
Dar fer true?

“Br’er Rabbit, he penned and he mighty hongry, but he answer lively :

Ha ! ha !

“Br’er Hawk, he say :

Me ’n my wife ’s tired er dry crust,
I ’low I ’ll pick yo’ bones fust.
If you miss me you may know
I ’ll be back to-morrow !

“Off he flew. Nex’ day back he come dartin’ ; he say :

Br’er Rabbit, you
Dar fer true?

“Br’er Rabbit, he gittin’ weaker ; he say :

Ha — ha — a —



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Br’er Hawk, he say ag’in :

So tired er dry crust
I ’low I pick yo’ bones fust.

“ Ev’y day same way twixt dem two. Last day Br’er Hawk, he say :

Br’er Rabbit, you
Dar fer true?

“ Br’er Rabbit ain’t say nothin’.

“ Hawk say :

Br’er Rabbit, you
Dar fer true?

“ Br’er Rabbit ain’t say nothin’.

“ Br’er Hawk, he say :

Br’er Rabbit, you
Dead fer true?

“ Br’er Hawk, he pull out de light wood knot. He drag out Br’er Rabbit. He fling Br’er Rabbit on de groun’. He say :

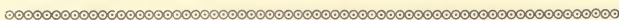
My wife ’s tired er dry crust,
I ’low I go fer her fust.

“ Off he flew.

“ Chillen, Br’er Rabbit was weakly. But when Br’er Hawk come back, Br’er Rabbit wa’n’t dar.”



MISTER BLUEBIRD'S DEBT



In the interval of story-telling, the talk of the women, now gathered in an interested group about Aunt Heartless' wash tub and the bench anear on which Jess sat, suggested to the child the story of the world-old debt of the Bluebird. This she told with great gusto :



Mister Bluebird's Debt



“**P**AYIN' debts is de hongriest business dat dar is. Hit 'pear ter me dat debts des eat inter you wid de mos' growin' appetite of anything dat dar is in dis worl'.

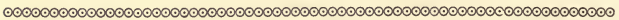
“You keep payin'. Dey keep weighin'. All time your end of de scale go up, dere end of de scale go down. You got to put in dat intrus',—puss cent, de 'vancin' men call it. Hit may be puss cent ter dem, but hit's dollars when hit leave de nigger's ole knit sock, dat I knows!

“Puss cent, lawyer's fee, co't cost, intrus', 'cordin' fee, mortgage, and now dey done stuck on dat what dey call rev'nue.

“Well, hit's al'a's somethin' new ter pay. Ev'y year call fer de ole-time pay, and de new also. Dat's de way I hears all dese men talk when dey make dey settlement fer a year's runnin'.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Dat’s de way Mister Bluebird talks mos’ of de year round. But yit he keep workin’ and singin’ in de sunshine.

“Fust bird us hear in de spring-time, hit’s him. Singin’ lak he don’t owe nobody nothin’; but, chillen, he owe de bigges’ sort of a debt. He owe fer his livin’. He been owin’ dat debt sence de worl’ was made. He gwine be owin’ dat debt twel de worl’ get wizzled.

“Who he owe?

“Chillen, he owe Cap’n Sparrer. He owe him ever’ year fer de las’ year’s livin’. He owe hit wid all dat intrus’, you mus’, ’cordin’ fee, mortgage, and all de res’. All summer long you can hear, — I can hear hit any summer day, — all de Sparrer fambly callin’ at Mister Bluebird:

Pay! Pay! Pay!

Ain’t yer gwine ter pay?

When yer gwine ter pay?

Pay! Pay!


“Anyhow, Br’er Bluebird do ’ford ever’ year to git him a new suit of cloze, spic an’ span new.

“He’s al’a’s de fust man in at de Spring ’Vival.

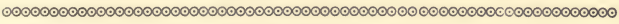
“He’s al’a’s dress out bran-broom-new!

“Whar he git dem new cloze?

“Don’t you ax no questi’ns ’bout dat. Maybe his ’Vancin’ Man let him sell his cotton-seed for hisse’f — sech a good price!



MISTER BLUEBIRD'S DEBT



“ Maybe Mis' Bluebird run a outside patch.

“ I dunno an' you dunno.

“ But 'tain't long 'fo', fine as he look, he 'gin ter git hongry, and he 'gin ter look blue.

“ Den he set on a limb and he sing ter Mis' Bluebird — Mis' Bluebird she ain't nuvver so blue as he is :

O ! la ! Lu !

I feel blue.

What us gwine do

When de meal give out ?

O ! la ! Lu !

“ 'Bout dis time Mis' Bluebird, she 's busy kiverin' dem eggs er hern, so she sing sorter keerless :

Can't you borrow

From Cap'n Sparrow ?

“ Den Mister Bluebird, he whistle back fum de limb whar he swing and sing :

True ! True ! True !

Dat 's what 'll do.

Dat 'll suit me ! Dat 'll suit you !

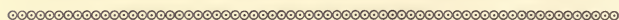
Lu ! Lu ! Lu !

“ Chillen, dat 's des what he do do. I 'spec' whilst he gittin' fat and livin' offer borrowed money, he fergit dat puss cent, and dat intrus', and dat you mus'

Pay ! Pay ! Pay !



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Ef he do, he ain't de fust one done des dat way. But you watch him in the fall er de yeah. He busy payin' dat debt. He got no time fer ter lay in any nex' year pervidin's fer hisse'f. He so busy payin' dat debt.

“How he do it?”

“You watch de corn fiel's when de shuck 'gins ter dry on de ear. Dar'll be a whole flock er fiel' sparrers des pickin' and stealin' corn in Mister Man's corn fiel'. And dar—you can see him—on de rail fence des aidge de big road set Mister Bluebird on the watch.

“He 's dere watchman.

“He 's lak de police up ter town wid de blue coat on. Dat's de way he pay on dat debt he owe Cap'n Sparrer and been owin' fer de longes'. He watch fer dem Sparrers whilst dey steal Mister Man's corn. You see him at it any day soon 's de corn git ripe.

“Soon 's he see any pusson comin 'long de big road, he whistle out:

You! You! You!

Better had flew.

Mister Man'll catch you!

Catch you! Catch you!

“Soon 's de Sparrers catch dat note er Bluebird's, off dey flash in a flock, fly away, and heah go Mister Bluebird behine 'em. Um-hum!



GREEDY HUMMING BIRD



“Owin’ debts ’ll keep you behine all time.

“Can’t he ever stop bein’ watchman bird fer de Sparrers?

“Law-sy-massy me! No. Dat he can’t. Work as he do, he des can keep de intrus’ down a li’l’ bit. And den all time de whole Sparrer fambly and all dey folks is atter Mister Bluebird:

Pay! Pay! Pay!

Pay! Pay!

Pay!”

Immortality abides and breathes in every frail flower-bulb, in every flower seedling. Still the deserted old garden about the Great House perennially grew bright with blossoms planted and sown in brighter days.

The little story-teller, seeing a humming bird fluttering over those blossoms, was minded to tell a story of that beauteous creature’s loss of voice.



Greedy Humming Bird

How She Came to Lose Her Voice



“**L**I’L’ girls, don’t nuvver be greedy. De Hummin’ Bird los’ her voice ’long of bein’ so greedy when she got her fust tas’e of honey.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Um-hum.

“ Don’t you see how she diffunt fum airy y’other bird ?
Still — still — still — no voice at all.

“ Long, long bill fer so li’l’ a bird, so long dat hit ’ll kill
you ef it stick in you.

“ At de fust tas’e of sweetness in de flowers, she begin to
whirl and twirl, she so please’, whirl and twirl so fas’ at
fust dat she tuck a swimmin’ in de head and she ain’t yit
been able to stop dat whirlin’. You can’t nuvver see a
Hummin’ still on de wing a minute.

“ Hit’s wheel and whirl, wheel and whirl, twel she do
even sound in her motion like a spinnin’ wheel.

“ De birds all seein’ how please’ she was wid de softness
and sweetness of honey, dey all want to p’int her to new
flowers.

“ Mockin’ Bird, he sing to her :

Honey-suckle ! Pretty pink
Dey de sweetes’ ones, I think !

“ Den Thrush, he sing to her :

Try de lily ! Try de rose !
Des try ev’y flower dat grows !

“ Off go de Hummin’ Bird : dis way she fly, dat way
she flash, ev’y way airy bird say go, dat way she ’d go.



GREEDY HUMMING BIRD



“ You see how she do yet flash and dash round ’mongst de flowers.

“ Soon she done got honey fum ev’y flower dat grow. De birds see dat she done got a gracious plenty and so dey try to stop her.

“ Dey all sing :

Stay! Stay! Stay!
And sing awhile wid us.
You got enough to-day!
Stay! ’Way!

“ But Hummin’ Bird she don’t pay no ’tention. Down ag’in in de lily. Down ag’in in de rose! Ev’y whicher-way she flash, suckin’ honey as she go. She choke her voice clean out of her wid honey.

“ Sweetness of honey she got, sweetness of singin’ she los’. She have a notion now dat she los’ her voice in some flower, dat she drap her voice deep in some flower.

“ She’s al’a’ys lookin’ fer dat los’ voice. Flash in dis flower! Dash in dat flower. But she’ll nuvver, nuvver find it.”

The children looking out over the old garden about the ruined Great House which even yet was sweet with spring’s earliest blossoming, were ready to believe that the Humming Bird truly sought her lost voice as they watched her spinning in airy whirls over and into the flower bells.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“’T was pretty much de same way wid de Robin, too,” proceeded the interpreter of bird talk, and further questioned concerning this assertion, she told the story of



Robin

How He Fell from Grace and Became Pie



“IN de ole fust times nobody no mo’ thought of a robin pie dan dey does now of a mockin’ bird stchew. Dem days Robin sang de sweetes’ song of airy bird on de trees, nairy bird could beat him at flyin’ high, nuther.

“But you see how ’t is wid him now, des short flights through de low hedges, and nairy a song at all, des a chirp, — des so :

Cheep-pee,

You see,

Can’t fly,

Not high!

“How come? Well, des like some folks sometimes los’ all off and get none back. Watch dem robins how dey fly round de chany-berry tree.

“Dat tree same as a bar-room to dem, des same as a bar-room to folks and niggers up to de town. T’ o’her



“Lookin’ fer dat los’ voice.”



ROBIN

birds all see Robin be eatin' too many of dem berries and dey all set to singin' to Mister Robin :

Stay away! Stay away!
Too much 'll do you harm, I say.
'Way! 'Way!

“ But Robins would n't pay no 'tention. Den dey would fly high, so high. But whichever way dey fly, dey will light on de chany-berry tree, full den like hit is now of dem wrinkled berries, and dem Robins dey eat, and eat, and eat! Fust thing dey tongue git thick and dey can't sing no mo'.

“ Um-hum!

“ Nex' thing, dey eatin' mo' and mo', dey git so heavy on de wing dat dey can't fly high no mo', des a short flight and a flutter. Last thing dey keep on eatin', dey head git so dizzy dat dey fall out dat tree — ker-plunk!

“ Dem ole days dar was des one ole nigger man in dis country, and he was name' ole Johnny Mingo. His wife was a ole black 'oman, name' Aunt Citty. She was cook 'oman fer Mis' Susan dem days.

“ When she see Mister Robin fall out de tree — ker-plunk! so drunk — she run ter de tree and pick him up.

“ She say: 'I-a, me, I gwine eat dis bird, me! I gwine-a cook-a dis bird — see!'



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

“Time she pick dat Robin up, ’nother one fall out de tree. Den ’nother! Den ’nother one!

“ ‘Dar!’ sez ole Aunt Critty, sez she: ‘I-a, me, I gwine ter make a pie — see!’

“She did.

“And white folks and black folks, too, been makin’ robin pies ever sence.

“And ’t was Mister Robin hisse’f taught ’em how wid his own foolishness.”

Jess made ready to depart from the Quarter when this story was ended. But the children pleaded for one more. She related the sure consequences of being pusillanimous as illustrated by the story of



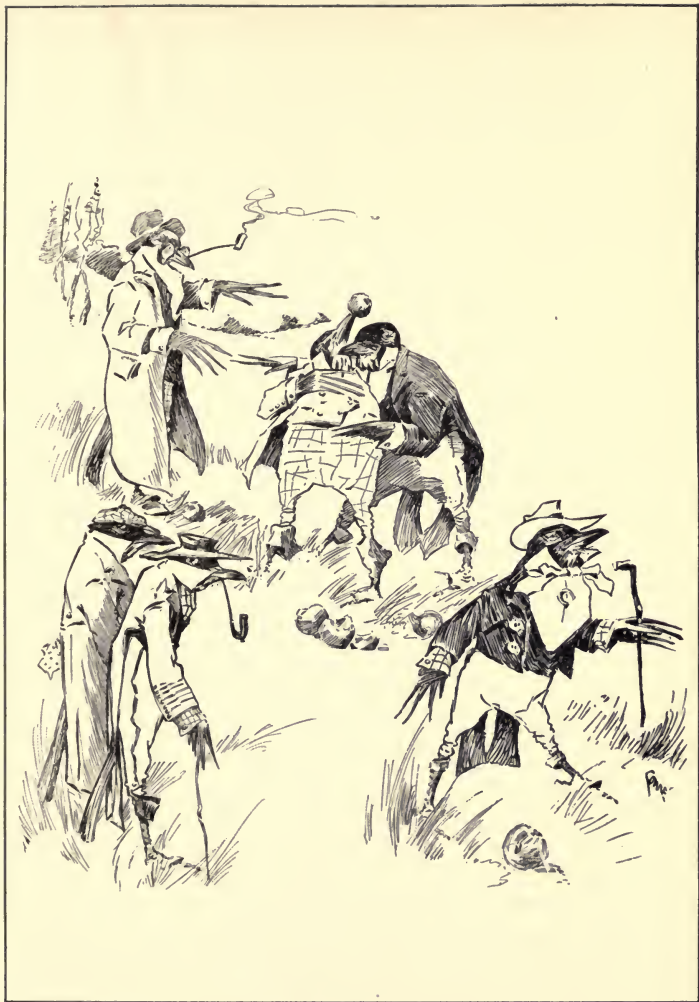
Br’er Jay

Why He Disappears Every Friday at Noon



“**U**VVER he do get forgiveness for what he done?
Who? Mister Jay Bird.

“When all de worl’ was water, he brung de fust grit er dirt. Dat make de ole Bad Man mad. He hold dat Mister Jay ain’t got no right ter do dat. He git a’t’ Br’er Jay sharp. Ax him: How come he so peart do dat?”



“Dey head git so dizzy.”



BR'ER JAY



“Jay Bird, he all time skeered when he ain't boastin' and bawlin'. All time boastin' and bawlin' when he ain't skeered.

“So soon as Bad Man 'gin ter argue, Br'er Jay holler :

I'll pay! I'll pay! I'll pay!

I'll pay!

My note's good! I'm Mister Jay!

I'll pay!

“Dat all Bad Man want. He tell Mister Jay all de pay he ax is des fer him ter come down to his place ever Friday, twixt twelve o'clock, 'midst er de day, and three o'clock 'fo' sundown, and bring a little stick er wood and give it to ole Aunt Squatty.

“Friday, twixt dem two times er de day, you nor me nor nobody don't see no Jay Bird heah.

“Dey ain't heah.

“Sis' Dove, she was right behine Jay wid a grit er dirt also. Bad Man tried to skeer her. But he did n't. She kep' on fetchin and totin' twel she start de worl' a-rollin' ag'in.

“'T won't do ter be too skeery.

“Cap'n Sparrer needed his spring plowin' done, and he, little as he do be, skeer Mister Jay inter puttin' his neck in de plow yoke. Hit's dar yit.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Cap’n Sparrer, he hol’ de lines, and he love ter say :

Gee-up! Gee! Gee!

You plow for me!

Fer me!

Gee!

“Sometime Jay git sorry ’bout all his troubles and den you hear him singin’ :

Po’ Jay! Po’ Jay!

“But mos’ time he ain’t sorry ’bout nothin’ he done. He des dance whilst de kill-dee’ pick de banjo, des as happy as a nigger in jail, dancin’ and singin’, and livin’ easy off eatin’ county vittles.”

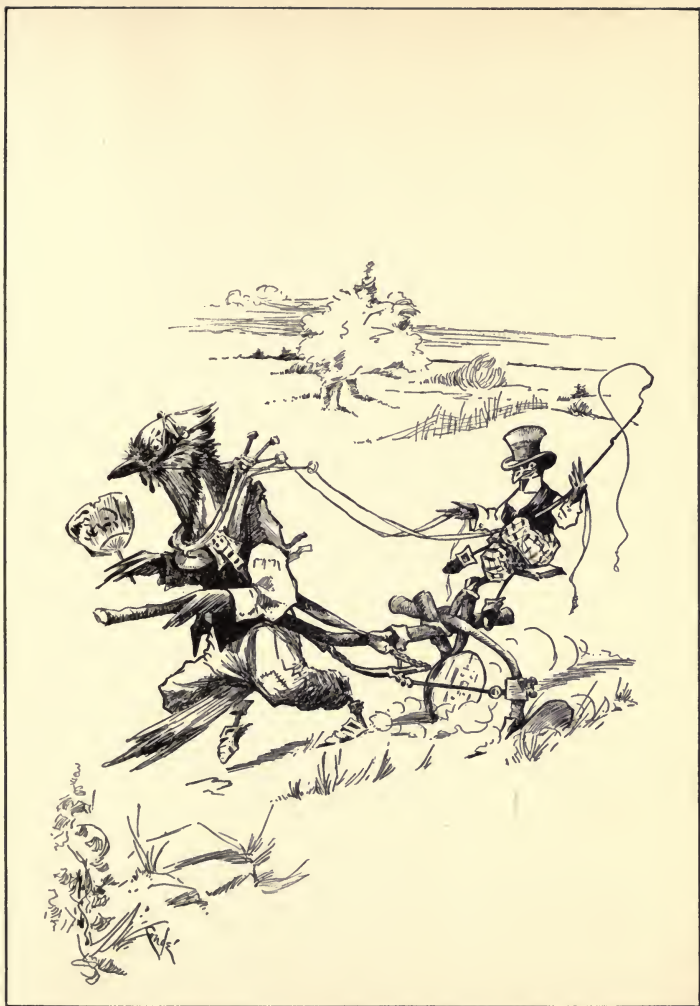


At the End of the Line



WITCH MENÉE’S daughter had come on a special errand to-day to bring for the richest man in the settlement an infallible cure for consumption (according to darky lore).

The cure was simple: Elder-berries ripened and dried in the sun, boiled in water to cover well, and when taken



“Cap’n Sparrer needed his spring plowin’ done.”



AT THE END OF THE LINE



from the fire to be set to ferment with a portion of wild bee honey.

Jess' fee on this occasion was a great one: a live and lively little pig.

The man's wife had lent the child a plow line with which to lead the pig to her cabin. "Bring back de line de nex' time you come," was the injunction repeatedly called after her when the end of the line had been put into her hand.

The trouble with Jess was ever to get off with the line—and the pig. The pig ran this way and that, and tangled the line every way.

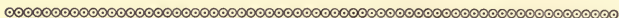
"Take in de slack of de line so he can't scoot so," was the cry from all sides as the Quarter folks watched her efforts with the pig and the line.

Good advice. But how was Jess to heed it when the pig was away yonder tangling the line about a bronze griffin and squealing lustily! The dusky children came in crowds to her assistance and the whole crowd of them volunteered to help her home with the unique physician's fee.

The escort was gladly accepted, and the band proceeded toward the swamp—the pig, reduced by numbers only, taking the way sedately at his end of the line in the midst of the crowd of children.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Hit put me in mind of de pig ole Johnny Mingo kill,” said the child, as they reached the swamp edge, — where-upon the children must have that story at once.



The Caze of Br'er Buzzard's Red Head



SO the entire party stopped on the swamp edge to hear the story. The thin little creature tucked her head on one side, her brown little figure topped with its little red head-handkerchief, making her look for all the world like one of the birds she told such stories of. She drew up her little high brown shoulders, and her eyes had just that furtive, wondering look that lurks in the eyes of a wild bird when it is snared and held in a human hand.

The black children gathered around her and she began :

“Some folks say one thing, some folks say y’o’her; but eve’ybody know Br’er Buzzard’s head is red and his head is raw.

“Not all de fambly is dat way. Some Buzzards is des plain black bal’. But some has dey heads red and raw. De way wid de red-head ones was dis-a-way:



BR'ER BUZZARD'S RED HEAD

“Br'er Buzzard was lazy. He would n't work. He would shirk. More'n dat, he des kill hisse'f laughin' ef he come 'crost anybody else what would work. But right den he got his piercin' eye. He can right den see far'r'n a star can see. Don't keer whar a cow, or pig, or horse, or dog be dead—or kilt—Br'er Buzzard, he can see whar hit lie. He can do dat twel yit.

“Dem days, ole Johnny Mingo he feel like he want a tas'e of de fresh. He go thoo de swamp wid 's ax on 's shoulder; he hear a pig squealin'.

“Um-hum!

“Dat pig co't in a grape vine.

“Johnny Mingo, he ain't got time to note whe'r dat pig got two swaller forks, or a hole in each year, or whe'r he marked wid under-bits. He des takes note dat dat shoat gwine choke lessen he be kilt and kilt quick, so he lam loose on him.

“Um-hum.

“Pig daid. Johnny Mingo fling him on to his back and run wid him to his house. He hide dat pig in de thicket nigh his do'. 'T ain't no use fer anybody see dat pig, hit des make 'em 'stressous 'bout he be daid. He hide him clost. He hide him fast. But yit Br'er Buzzard find him at last. Round, round, and round, way up high in dat sky Ole Br'er Buzzard fly.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ He send down de sight er dat keen eye.

“ He ’way high in dat sky. He see dat pig.

“ Down he come.

“ Is you ever heard Br’er Buzzard drap ?

“ When you hear him come down, he sound — clap ! —
like a big gun.

“ He fold his wings tight — and den he drap.

“ Des ’fo’ he tetch de groun’ he fling out his wings, and
he come down rest de way — des as light — as light.

“ He done des dat way soon ’s ever he spy dat pig, and
he lit right by Johnny Mingo.

“ Johnny Mingo stand right at his do’. Look lak he
don’t know nothin’ ’bout no pig.

“ Br’er Buzzard, he step up ; he say :

John-o-Mingo,
I smell de fresh,
Ah-ho.

“ Johnny Mingo, he say :

No, no.

“ Br’er Buzzard nod his fine head, ’t was top-knot den,
he say :

John-o-Mingo
I see de fresh
Ah-ho.



BR'ER BUZZARD'S RED HEAD



“ Johnny Mingo, he say :

No, no.

“ Br'er Buzzard, he wink his eye, he say :

John-o-Mingo,
Des you 'n' me,
Oh-ho.

“ Johnny Mingo, he 'stressous, but hit can't be helped now, so he say :

Den, ef you know,
Des anyhow. Dough —


“ Br'er Buzzard, he smack his jaws :

Um-hum.
John-o-Mingo,
Yes, I do know.

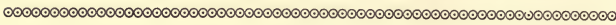
“ Johnny Mingo, he tak up his ax. He know now he gotter 'vide up. He fix ter grind de ax fer ter cut dat pig half in two. When you are find out, you gotter 'vide out. He say :

Yas, Br'er Buzzard, you got de fac's,
Now he'p me ter grind de ax.

“ Br'er Buzzard des laugh at dat. He no worker. He a true shirker. He say :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Ho-ho.

John-o-Mingo.

I got de fac's —

And you grind yo' own ax!

“Ole Johnny Mingo, he begin to grind. He grind and he grind. Hit mighty hard to hold de ax, and turn de stone, and po' de water. But Johnny Mingo, he done it all. Ole Br'er Buzzard, he hop round. Ev'y minute he choose his part.

Dis my part,

I put dis my meat cart.

“He done choosed mo''n th'ee thirds er dat pig now, and Johnny Mingo yit a grindin' de ax. D'rectly de ax sharp as a razor and Johnny Mingo lean it, blade up, 'g'inst a log, and 'low he'll argufy wid Br'er Buzzard 'bout which half and part.

“Dey argufy bad. Br'er Buzzard git mad.

“Ole Johnny Mingo set in his do', say he dunno.

“Ole Br'er Buzzard step back and fo' front de do'.

“He laugh and he laugh, say he mus' have bigges' half.

“He say he can't work, and Johnny Mingo can't shirk. He say he got de fac's and Johnny Mingo done grind de ax — and so —

“Dar now! Br'er Buzzard walkin' to and fro done



“Pick up dat scalp lock and hop off wid hit.”



BR'ER HAWK AND DE FLINT ROCK



step in a rattan vine ; de furl of it done trip him up. His head fell 'crost dat sharp ax-blade. Whew ! What he do ?

“ Chillen, dar wa'n't nothin' fer him ter do but pick up dat scalp lock and hop off wid hit.

“ Him 'n' his fambly er folks done had a red head ever sence.”

The sights and sounds of the woods were readily provocative of suggestion for stories of the forest denizens, and Jess was eager to show her appreciation of the escort, so stories followed each other in rapid succession from her lips.

Sight of a blue darting hawk speeding to cover reminded Jess of the story of



Br'er Hawk and de Flint Rock



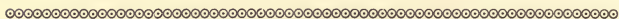
“ **B**R'ER Hawk feared of a flint rock. Atter Br'er Hawk done fool Mis' Susan and eat up all de fried chicken outen her po'try yard what Preacher Crow's done been watchin', he got hongry ag'in.

“ He so hongry he could n't stand it no longer. He ready to risk his neck for des a chicken wing.

“ He 'low to try dat same trick he play onct befo' on Mis' Susan.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ He fly to de house.

“ He dart down de chimbly. He fell down — ker-flop !

“ Dar !

“ Mis’ Susan, she des done put in a flint rock ’long wid takin’ a new brood off de hatchin’ nest.

“ Br’er Hawk, he come down — ker-flop !

“ His head hit on dat flint rock.

“ Hit knocked him plum silly.

“ Mis’ Susan hollered to Johnny Mingo fer to come fetch a twine string and ketch Br’er Hawk.

“ Johnny Mingo, he so glad Br’er Hawk caught dat he come a-runnin’. He tie dat string fast ter Br’er Hawk’s foot and tote Br’er Hawk out de house and tie de y’o’her end dat string ter a sprig of osage-orange tree in de hedge.

“ Des little time de fraish air bring Br’er Hawk to his senses.

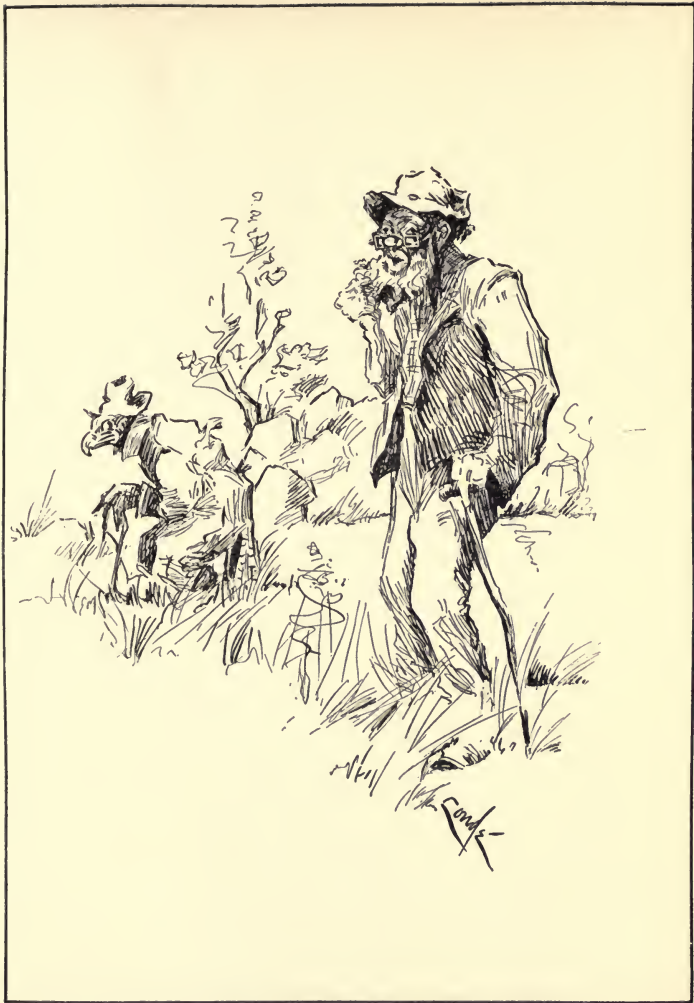
“ Bless goodness ! Soon ’s he git his wits, he see he tied. He dunno what ter do.

“ Hongry as ever, and now feared he gwine starve outright. He skeered he be tied dar too tight fer ter git off anyhow. He set and study. He draw his eye down. He wink and he blink.

“ D’rectly he take an idee. He say :

Johnny Mingo,

Ef you know



“Johnny Mingo stared and study.”



BR'ER HAWK AND DE FLINT ROCK



For what you tie under me
Dese thorns, one, two, three?
'Clar' ter goodness I don't see.

“ Johnny Mingo, he say :

I ain't tied no three thorns under you,
I get some 'un else ter do.

“ Br'er Hawk, he say :

I see three thorns tied,
Come see ef I lied.

“ Johnny Mingo, he come look, he 'sturb' in his mind.
He say :

I see yo' foot tied. Dat's all.
I don't see no three thorns at all.

“ Br'er Hawk, he say :

Gracious goodness me,
Dat ain't my foot you see !
Dat's thorns, one, two, three.
I got you fool, he-he !

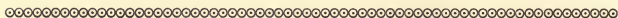
“ Johnny Mingo, he 'gin to feel foolish ; he say :

Ef dis ain't yo' foot, Hawk,
Whar is yo' foot? Talk !

“ Br'er Hawk say :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Hit's drawn up under my wing,
 Can't you see, Johnny Ming-
 O? I can't hold it up longer,
 I'm gittin' weaker 'stidder stronger.

“Johnny Mingo stared and study. Br'er Hawk, he say :

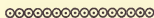
Untie dis three-thorn stick,
 And tie my foot, quick !

“Johnny Mingo, he untie de string. Br'er Hawk, he off on de wing.

“Dar now !

“But twel yit, he feared of a flint rock.”

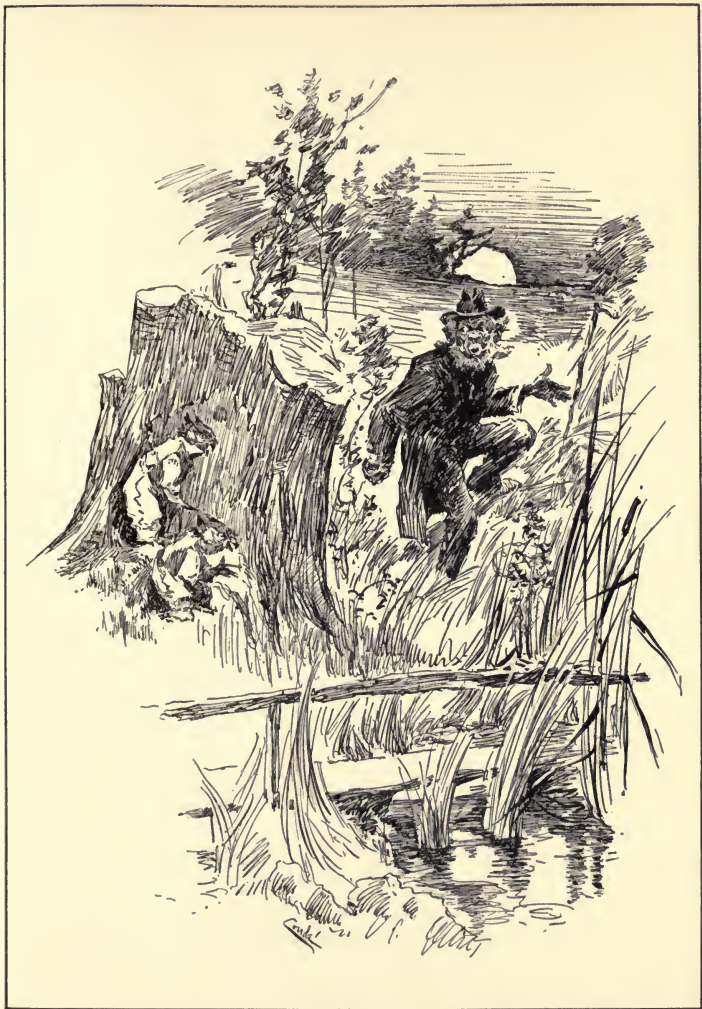
As darkness of the swamp surrounded the children on the way to the cabin that stood close to the Dollyhyde stream, Jess told them of the reputed origin, in negro lore, of some of the swamp dwellers :



In de Swamp



“OLE Johnny Mingo, he lived in a house on de Up-place. His ole 'oman, she worked down on de Low-place. Ole massas in de ole days had some two or three places den lak dey does now.



“ Johnny Mingo stop, look all round ; he ain’t see nobody.”



IN DE SWAMP



“ Ev’y Saddy night, ole Johnny Mingo he go thoo de swamp and ’crost de creek, and ten miles on, ter see his ole ’oman ; stay twel Monday mornin’.

“ One Saddy night, ’bout turn er de year, ole Johnny Mingo des atter sundown tuck off his red head-handkercher and wrop his hair fresh, and tie on his red head-handkercher ag’in and take his hick’ry walkin’ stick and start down de big road ter de swamp, gwine on and thoo ter de Low-place ter see his ole ’oman, gwine to stay twel Monday mornin’.

“ Hit was des fust dark when he got to de swamp. He walk ’long on de aige er de woods, shovin’ back de’ grass wid his foots as he step and scurce leavin’ a track. He hear somebody laughin’: Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!

“ Johnny, he stop, look all round ; he ain’t see nobody ; he say : ‘ Who you laughin’ at ? ’ Um-hum !

“ Some ’un say : ‘ Who-o-o-who-oo-o-’

“ Johnny Mingo say : ‘ Dat’s hit now. I ax you — who ? ’

“ He don’t ’ceive no ansah but : ‘ Ha-ha ! Qua-qua ! Ha-ha ! ’

“ Sound lak a heap er ole folks — rale ole Affikan folks, lak dere was in de fust days, — done met up and was ringin’ — up-de-ring in de deep swamp.

“ Ole Johnny Mingo, he shake his head, and de ends er



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

his head-handkercher shake out behine, too, and he des go 'long.

“Time he git little far'r, some'un say: ‘Whar are you gwine?’

“Johnny Mingo, he stop right still, hunch up his shoulders, fetch his chin inter his throat, turn his eyes round and round and listen; he hyar:

“‘Whar you gwine, you?’

“Johnny Mingo say:

“‘I gwine down ter de Low-place ter see my ole 'oman. Massa buyed me and-a my-a ole 'oman-a. And he-a set me-a to work-a on de Up-place-a and-a my ole 'oman-a on de Low-place-a. And ev'y Saddy night-a I goes ter de Low-place-a ter see-a my ole 'oman-a. And I stays-a twel Monday mornin'-a.’

“Some'un deep in de swamp say:

“‘Go back! Go back! Go back!’

“Johnny Mingo, he feared not to go back. He knowed 't was bad luck to turn round twel yer got ter whar you gwine, so he make a cross-mark wid his foot and spit in de middle er de mark fer ter turn off de bad luck, and he turn round ag'in toward de Up-place. He go good ways back an' he hear:

Robber! Robber! Shoe-boot

Chicken soup, so good —



IN DE SWAMP



“ Johnny Mingo know right den dat his ole ’oman got a chicken in de pot — nummine whar she git hit — and hit mos’ ’pear lak ter him dat his old ’oman is talkin’ to him ’bout dat chicken soup so good. He turn round ag’in, start back thoo de swamp. He go good ways and he hear :

“ ‘ Who-oo-o you ? ’

“ He stop, look all round, see nobody ; he say :

“ ‘ I ’m-a name Johnny Mingo. I ’long ter ole massa. I live on de Up-place.’

“ ‘ Who-oo-o yer folks ? ’

“ He stop, look all round, don’t see nobody, but he say :

“ ‘ My folks de ole folks. And I ain’t got no folks at all but my ole ’oman-a and she live on de ole place and I lives on de new.’

“ He hear :

Who-who-who ?

Qua-qua-qua-

Ha-ha-ha !

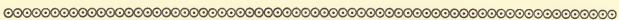
“ Den he go long. Moon rise now and ef he don’t git on day ’ll break ’fo’ he git dar whar he gwine. He git to de same place whar he was ; he hear :

Whar yer gwine ?

Whar yer gwine ?



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ He say : ‘ I ’ m gwine down ter de Low-place-a ter see-a my ole ’ oman-a. Ole massa buyed me-a and-a my ole ’ oman, she live-a on de ole place-a and I lives on de new — and ev ’ y Saddy night-a I goes ter see her-a and-a I stays twel Monday mornin ’ ! ’

“ He hear :

“ ‘ Go back ! Go back ! Go back ! ’

“ Law-sy-massy me ! Ole Johnny Mingo, he dat out-done as he don ’ t know what to do. He make a cross-mark wid ’ s foot, spit in de middle, and turn back whichever way he come. Ever ’ whichever way he hear in all de holler trees :

Qua-qua-qua !

Ha-ha-ha !

“ Johnny Mingo ’ s ole ’ oman, she settin ’ in her house ’ way ’ crost de swamp a-watchin ’ de pot er chicken soup a-bilin ’. She wait and she watch. She say :

“ ‘ Whar Johnny Mingo ? ’

“ She go to de do ’. She look out.

“ She go back. Set by de fire. She set and stir de pot er chicken soup. She wait and she watch.

“ She say :

“ ‘ Whar Johnny Mingo ? ’

“ ’ Bout moonrise she git her stick out de cornder, she tie her head-handkercher on tight. She start out thoo



IN DE SWAMP



de swamp fer ter meet Johnny Mingo, he so long time comin'. Time she git deep in de swamp she hear :

“ ‘Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!’

“She stop. She turn her head round clean hind side befo'. She ain't see nobody. She say :

Who you?

Ha-ha! Ha-ha!

“De ole 'oman, she say :

Is dat you, oh

Johnny Mingo?

“Nobody ain't 'turn her no ansah. She go 'long. D'rectly she hear :

“ ‘Who-oo-o who-o-you?’

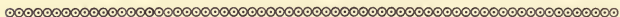
“She stand still in de wood. She hunch up her shoulders, she look all round, she turn her head clean hind side befo'. She ain't see nothin' yit. She make ansah, dough :

“ ‘My ole man's Johnny Mingo. He 'longs-a ter my ole massa, and-a he works on-a de new place, and I works-a on de old. And-a ev'y Saddy night-a he come ter my house-a and stay twel Monday mornin'. And-a chicken soup too done, and I'm gwine-a ter meet my ole man-a.'

“Some 'un say :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ ‘ Go back ! Go back ! Go back ! ’

“ Dar now ! Dat ole ’oman, she turn round in de road. She make a cross-mark wid her foot, she spit in de middle of it, and she start back de way she come to’ards home.

“ ‘Fo’ she get good ways, she hear :

Whoo-oo is yo’ folks ?

I know who-oo ’s my folks,

But who-oo-oo is y’ all ?

“ Johnny Mingo’s ole ’oman turn to’ard de swamp ag’in. She say :

“ ‘ I ’m Johnny Mingo’s ole ’oman-a, and I ain’t got no folks at all-a. And-a tell me : Who is y’ all ? ’

“ Wid dat, she put her foot in de road and start out ag’in ter meet Johnny Mingo. She go good ways and she hear :

“ ‘ Go back ! Go back ! ’

“ She say :

Wha’ fer ?

Is chicken soup a-burnin’ ?

Do cook-pot need a-turnin’ ?

“ She ain’t hear no ansah but :

Chicken soup

So good !

Chicken soup

So good !



IN DE SWAMP



“ Dat de way hit was twel de turn er de night ; fust she go on, den she go back ; on and back ; on and back. Twel nex’ thing she done clean got los’ in de swamp and don’t know whicherway ter go. She scrouch down under a holler tree and go to studyin’ ; she set dar studyin’ twel she hear some’un say :

I cooks fer my folks
But who-oo-oo-o
Coo-oo-ks fer y’ all ?

“ De ole ’oman set studyin’ under de holler tree, and she make ansah :

Nobody but me ’n’ Mingo
Ain’t got no folks at all !
I cooks fer me ’n’ Mingo ;
And who dat cooks fer y’ all ?

“ Nex’ thing she hear some’un chuckle deep in dey throat :

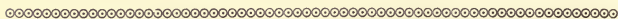
Tea-supper,
Tea-supper,
Tea-supper !

“ Sez she :

Wha’ — wha’ — wha’
Gwine cook fer
Tea-supper ?



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ She hear :

Chicken foot
And sparrergrass an’
Sassafras-tea !
So good ! So good !

“ Dat ole ’oman say, sez she :

Dat is good
And I don’t know but what I’ll stay
Long ’s I can’t git away
Ter eat tea-supper
Wid you-oo-oo !

“ So dar she stay. She dar twel yit. She settin’ under de holler tree, settin’ and studyin’ and talkin’ back and fort’ wid de owls.


“ Was dem owls ?

“ Co’s’ dey was. Is you ever heard anything but owls and ole, rale ole folks talk dat way ? I ain’t.

“ Me ’n’ mammy huntin’ night-moths come nights in de swamp, us hears dem owls. Dey talk des dat way.

“ Whar ole Johnny Mingo ?

“ He hear de same thing lak his ole ’oman hear. He turn round and round so much also dat he get los’ also. He set under a holler tree. He set and he study. He ansah back and fort’ to de owls. He one er de ole



IN DE SWAMP

Affika-folks. He talk lak de owls and de owls talk lak him.

“ De ole, ole, ole fust folks is des lak owls, and de owls dey is des lak de ole folks — and *de owls is ole folks*.

“ Ole Johnny Mingo and his ole 'oman, dey set in de holler trees and dey ansah back and fort' to one n'o'her and ter de owls, and de owls ansah back an' fort' ter dem. You, ner me, ner dem, know which fum t' o'her.

“ *'T was time dem two ole folks went to de swamp.*

“ Eat a owl? Who? Me? I ain't no cannibal. What I doin' eatin' same as *folks*? Dey *is* ole folks. Nothin' but folks — and owls — can talk lak dey do.

“ I hears 'em gwine on back an' fort' all night long :

Robber! Robber!

Shoe-boot.

Chicken-soup-so-good!

Wha'-wha'-wha'- fer supper?

Chicken foot an'

Sparrergrass an'

Hominy and butter.

I cooks fer my folks

And who-oo-oo

Cooks fer y' all?

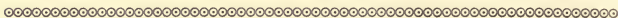
My folks

Is yo' folks

And same folks and all!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Dey chuckles deep in dey throats :

Wha’-wha’-wha’-gwine ?

Go back ! Go back ! Go back ! ”

When the children were leaving Jess and her pig in sight of her mother’s cabin, she gave them in parting a bit of friendly advice which might, chance favoring, win them good fortune. She told them when they had left the swamp behind and come into the open, to look in the high grass and sedge of the fields for partridge eggs.

Partridge eggs were the only bird-eggs that might be eaten with impunity. For all the other eggs of birds would, if eaten, put sundry spells on the unwary eaters thereof.

Apropos of this advice, she told the story of the



Field Lark and Partridge



“ **W**HEN Fiel’ Lark and Partridge was young, dey had a talk, but dey could n’t agree. Nairy one would let loose his end of de argument. Bof b’lieve and ’clar’ de b’lief dat dey knowed bes’.

“ Fiel’ Lark say he gwine be up, up, up while de sun ’s



FIELD LARK AND PARTRIDGE

low, and he say dat 'll insu' him a long life. He so do and he 's a long-livin' 'dustrious bird.

“ Partridge say what 's de use er livin' long ef you gotter all de time work hard. He say better run low in de grass and live by rich pickin's. He say better be stout and de worl' don't know you, dan slim and de sun show you.

“ Fiel' Lark, he say :

Ef you do dat
You 'll git *too* fat.
And Mister Man 'll kill you right now !
Des now !

“ Partridge, he make ansah :

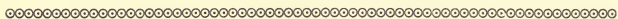
No fear !
Don't keer !
Good cheer !
While I am heah !
Don't keer !

“ Dem two keep dat up all summer long. All de whole endurin' time dem two quar'l des dat way. Up go de Fiel' Lark whilst de sun 's yit low :

Dis laziness 'll kill you !
Dis laziness 'll kill you !
Des now !
Right now !



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Partridge runnin’ and hidin’ and scootin’ low in de bushes, he whistle clear :

Don’t keer !

Don’t keer !

“ He don’t keer bit neither. Ever’ year he round and fat. He git kilt up, too. But twel he do he keep whistlin’ :

Don’t keer !

Do you hear ?

I don’t keer !

“ Fiel’ Lark, he fly so high, he work so hard, he eat so little dat his wings is thin, his legs is slim, his body so po’ nobody want ter eat him. He de long liver. He’s up wid de day, singin’ all de time :

Dat laziness ’ll kill you !

Right now !

Des now !”



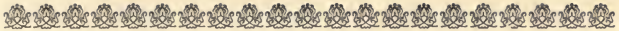
Twelve O’Clock



HAPPY hour for the Quarter folks. The sun stands straight overhead, and its most powerful heat falls gratefully on the dark, sun-loving children of the tropics.



“Fiel’ Lark, he say : ‘Ef you do dat you ’ll git *too* fat, and Mister Man ’ll kill you right now!’ ”



TWELVE O'CLOCK



The clink, clink, clink of the plow-chains comes from every side as the hands bring in the mules from the fields.

The women bestir themselves from napping, those who have not worked with the "field-squad," to set out the hoe-cake on the deal table that is within every cabin.

The slices of fat meat sizzle on the three-legged spider on every cabin hearth. Roasted sweet potatoes, crisping in the ashes, send out inviting odors.

The children come in from "minding," driving the cows before them to "water" at the spring branch. Young girls bring up from the coolness of the spring trough brown jugs filled with buttermilk.

In the feed-boxes nailed against the trunks of trees men throw the provender for the stock.

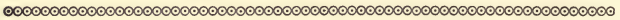
Here and there on the bench at the door of some cabin a negro boy strikes a lively tune on his banjo and there gather about him a crowd of young negroes ready to break into song, or dance, or laughter as the music leads.

"Twelve o'clock rest" extends far into the afternoon, and all these hours are full of talk, or nap, or song, or dance, as pleases these children of nature.

The Quarter World's idle time is work time for Witch



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Menée's daughter. From cabin to cabin she vends her wares. There is always in spring good sale for love-powers, and ever is the red-eyed conjure-worker abroad in the land.

A share of plantation good-cheer, of feeding and of jollity, well repays Jess for the stories she is urged to tell.

A group of men and women as well as children gather about her as she relates the legends of the forest folks.

Like every good story-teller, her tales reflect the minds of her audience, and she speaks with a wisdom of years and experiences not her own. For the mind and the desires, the fancies and the foibles of our day write themselves and are promulgated and preserved in the words of raconteurs.

Jess told to her audience the story of



Mistress Peafowl's Bad Luck



I HEAR of folks make a mighty 'miration 'bout how come a creeter what is so spruce as ole Jedge Peacock git hisse'f sech a plain mate as Mis' Peahen. I reckon dem folks ain't hear tell how onct Mis' Peahen's feathers



MISTRESS PEAFOWL'S BAD LUCK

had as bright a color and as broad a sweep as Jedge Peacock's trail has.

“How come? Des 'caze of bein' foolish and vain. Mister Snake, too, he was de start of hit wid his meanness. Mister Snake, he kept hiss'n':

Sech a beauty! So! Sech a beauty! So!

“Mis' Peacock, she 'low:

I wonder is I sech a beauty? Oh!

“Mister Snake, he slip and slide to a spring nigh by and he say:

Look in de spring, and see
If you ain't a beau-ty!

“She run to de spring and she look in de clear water. She see her fine crown head, she see her shinin' eye; she 'low:

True 'tis! A beauty I is!

“‘Yas so — yas so!’ hiss Mister Snake:

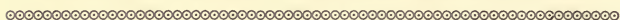
Yo' feathers is fine,
Yo' blue feathers shine,
O Sis' Peahen, des look behine.

“Mis' Peahen, she jump and she jerk and she jump and she jerk, but nairy a look could she git at her trail.

“Br'er Ground-hog was des den tryin' to turn over a



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



rock whar he been sleepin' under all winter. He wish to see if he could yit see his shadder in de sun, and Mister Snake tell Mis' Peahen, she set her trail whar dat rock gwine fall, and dat onct she git her trail to stay steady and still, den she can see all her fine feathers.

“Mis' Peahen, foolish den like she is now, she spread all her fine feathers right under de fall of dat rock.

“Here come de rock — ker-flip! ker-flap! Same time Mis' Peahen lipt so spry and lipt so high, and turnt so quick, and turnt so slick, to try to see her fine tail, dat — Dar now! She seed de scrope of her fine feathers, — but she seed 'em afur off.

“Mister Snake, he done fool and flatter her 'bout she so fine and den and dar she been foolish enough to lose all her fine feathers.

“Jedge Peacock, he come up — he was mad to see Mis' Peahen done ac' so silly. Sech a hollerin' wa' n't never heard befo'. But you can hear him holler des dat way twel yit, 'special de fust of de spring when Br'er Ground-hog come out to see his shadder. Also, he jumped on Mister Rattler whar he was quailed up, and stomped and tromped round on him. Des dat same way you can see Jedge Peacock stomp and tromp round and round now on sunshiny days when he studies 'bout Mister Snake, so 'ceitful, fool Miss Peahen out all her fine feathers.



MIS' MOCKIN' BIRD'S CHILLEN



“What come of de feathers? Well, I reckon dat was de start of folks makin’ fly brushes out er pea-fowl feathers.”

After reproving the vanity of the grown up, with the impartiality of an artist, Jess proceeded to rebuke the faults of the young, under cover of the story of



Mis' Mockin' Bird's Chillen



“**M**IS' MOCKIN' BIRD had as nice a lot er little chillen as ever you see. Dey was neat, and dey was fat, and dey was frolicsome; but den dey was stubborn, — des as stubborn as a passel er mules.

“When dey ma tole 'em: ‘You do dis,’ den dey would n't.

“When dey pa tole 'em: ‘Don't do dat,’ den dey would. Dat des de way dem chillen done.

“Dey ma beat on 'em.

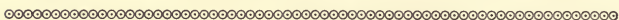
“Dey pa beat on 'em.

“Dey gran'folks lammed on 'em. Dey uncles and dey aunts nigh 'bout wanted to kill 'em. Dey pestered de whole neighborhood wid dey stubborn ways.

“But law-sy-massy me! de way dey could sing!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ How dey did sing !

“ Um-hum ! How did dey sing ?

“ Nobody can't tell you dat now.

“ Dat song it done los' out de worl'.

“ Hit was des dis way.

“ Time de 'zamination fer de singin' school come, Mis' Mockin' Bird she call up all her chillen, and she comb dey heads and she bresht dey close, and she tell 'em dey be good chillen.

“ Den she send dem off ter de 'zamination of de singin' choir.

“ Dey was a neat lot er chillen.

“ Dey was all one age and dey was all one size. But law-sy-massy me, when dey git dar !

“ Ole Sis' Owl, she ain't nuvver sing, but den she can teach how, — she set out de row of singers, and she riz her hand fer 'em ter riz de chune ; she say :

You-you-you

Sing all !

“ Den did n't dem little birds riz dat chune, some tolled de ballet and some fetched de foller.

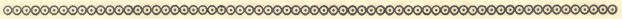
“ But Mis' Mockin' Bird's chillen, dey des mashed dey backs 'g'inst de wall, and dey would n't sing nothin'. Ole Mis' Owl, she say :



“Des mashed dey backs 'g'inst de wall.”



MIS' MOCKIN' BIRD'S CHILLEN



Who-who-who
Dat don't sing at all?

“ 'Fo' dis ever' set er Mis' Mockin' Bird's chillen done out-sing all de res' er de singers, but now dey don't sing at all.

“ Ever'body ax 'em :

Why 'n' you sing?
J'ine in de ring!

“ Dem chillen, dey know de up, dey know de down. Dey can sing all de singers down. But now dey don't sing nothin'.

“ Dey ma wanter beat on 'em. Dey pa wanter beat on 'em. Dey gran'folks wanter lam loose on 'em. Dey aunts and dey uncles nigh 'bout wanter kill 'em. Dey des stand wid dey fingers in dey mouf, grinnin'.

“ Dey could sing de sweetest song and de neatest song in de worl', and dey would n't sing nary a bit.

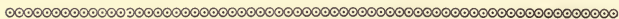
“ What was de song dey could sing ef dey would sing?

“ Dat's hit now.

“ You don't hear Mister Mockin' Bird and his folks sing nairy song of dey own now. Dey los' dat song tee-total, — 'long er bein' so stubborn dat day at de 'zamination er de singin' choir.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Dey never could sing dat song no mo’.

“ Not er one er de young ’uns could ever sing dat song any mo’. De ole ’uns dey die off, and ter dis day mockin’ birds don’t sing no song of dey own, but dey des mock ever’ song dat y’o’her birds do sing.

“ Hit mighty bad ter be mulish.”

Many are the stories of Mister Mocking Bird. One of the most popular of these tales Jess began now.

It was the story of



Mister Bluebird and Mister Mocking Bird



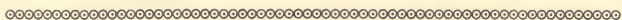
“ **M**OCKIN’ BIRD sho’ is most meddlesome bird in de worl’. He’ll fight anything also. I is seed him fight a dog ef hit is come too nigh its nest, let ’lone fight any bird what pesters him.

“ He des been whipped, or nigh whipped onct, and Mister Bluebird was de man what done hit,—or nigh done hit.

“ ’T was atter Mister Mockin’ Bird done take to de yards and house-lots, ’caze of his meddlesome ways wid de



BLUEBIRD AND MOCKING BIRD



wile birds, and dey all mad wid him. Meddlesome as he can be and mettlesome also.

“Mister Bluebird, he done conclude to come live nigh Mister Man’s house also. He done ’low to settle hisse’f in de apple tree. He feel so pestered and he feel so blue, Mister Bluebird do. All year long he done listen ter de sparrers hollerin’ at him :

Pay! Pay!
Won’t yer pay?
Why don’t yer pay?

“De partridge, she hear de fuss dat de sparrers al’a’s keepin’ up and she whistle ter Mister Bluebird :

In debt?
You bet!
Can’t yer pay?
Not yet.

“Come sundown, de chimney swallers ’gin ter float about wid dere :

R-r-r-oute!
You better pay out
Wid a half-a-dollar!
Half-a-dollar!
Half-a-dollar!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

“ Fust thing nex’ mornin’ up go de fiel’ lark and all de same he come in de fuss, too, wid :

Interes’ ’ll kill you !

Interes’ ’ll kill you

Just now ! Right now !

“ De jay bird, he ’gin sech another racket also :

Away ! Away !

A debt to pay !

To-day !

To-day !

Or Friday.

“ Hit was dat way all de time. Ever’body riz and ’vise wid Mister Bluebird, but nobody stop off de interes’ er de debt. Hit was plum dusgussed.

“ Mister Bluebird, he was so pestered dat he made up his mind ter leave de whole of ’em and go to livin’ wid Mister Man — lak he do fer de mo’es’ part of de year anyhow.

“ No sooner he set his nes’ whar he want it in de apple tree an’ him ’n’ his ole ’oman get good settle down, he whistle to her :

O la ! Lu —

Dis ’ll do —

Don’t dis suit you ?

Hit ’ll do ! Hit ’ll do !



BLUEBIRD AND MOCKING BIRD



“’Fo’ she kin answer him, he hear right over him in de cedar tree :

In debt?
You bet!
Can’t yer pay?
Not yet.

“ Fer de gracious! Whoever heard tell of a partridge in a cedar tree !

“ Mister Bluebird, he fly to de nest and he whistle low to Mis’ Bluebird :

La! Lu!
Did you
Ever? Lu, Lu!

“’Fo’ he git over his ’miration at dat, he hear same lak Sis’ Dove :

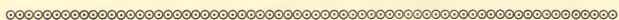
Coo-coo-oo —
I ’d pay ef I was you —
True — true — true!

“ Wile Dove come down to de gyarden! Well, den, Mister Bluebird mighty brave, but he tremble now on de limb; den he whistle so low :

La! Lu!
Did you
Ever? La, Lu!



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Him ’n’ her set ter makin’ sech a ’miration ’bout dat as never was, but here come a bigger migra yet. He hear :

Take keer ! Take keer !

What yer ’bout ? What yer ’bout ?

You better pay out —

“De voice lak de voice of Mister Bull Bat. Broad day, sun high, and Mister Bull Bat never come out twel ’bout fust dark. Mister Bluebird, he shake his head. He ’pear lak he bluer ’n ever. He whistle :

O la ! Lu !

Dat do

Beat all ! Lu !

“Dar he set on a limb, he did, and he heard ’em all : sparrer, jay, chimney swaller, partridge, even to rooster — and who ever befo’ heard a rooster crow in a high cedar tree ? But Mister Bluebird set right clost to Mis’ Bluebird, and he heard :

Cock-a-doodle-do !

Hit’s better-er-er for you

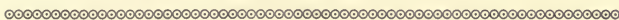
Ter pay de debt fer true.

Cock-a-doodle-do !

“Mister Bluebird and Mis’ Bluebird, dey set and study ’bout dey air gwine back to de wile woods, dey was !



BLUEBIRD AND MOCKING BIRD



But, dar now. What Mister Bluebird hear outen dat tall cedar tree but,

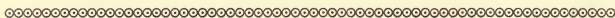
O la! Lu,
What us gwine ter do?
Us owe a debt fer true!
O la! Lu!

“Dar now. De sec’et was out. Mister Bluebird, he knowed dat wa’n’t him — ef ’t was lak him — and sho’ enough who but Mister Mockin’ Bird did des den fly outer dat cedar tree! Who but him!

“Mister Bluebird, he had no thought but to go for him. Den dey fit. De way dem birds fit! Hit was blue up and gray down. Hit was gray up and blue down. Hit was feathers flyin’ ’round and ’round. ’Pear lak de air was blue wid ’em, den gray wid ’em. Dem birds was ’bout to fight twel dey was bar’ as when dey was hatch. Dat’s hit now. Twel yit nobody don’t edzactly know who whipped dat fight. All dey do know is dat Mister Mockin’ Bird don’t mock at Mister Bluebird now — not ’n’es he do hit mighty easy — and den when Mister Bluebird ain’t round, when he is maybe off on business fer de sparrer in de fiel’.”



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Lost Things



“**W**HAT you los’, Aunt Heartless?” inquired Witch Menée’s daughter, for the finding of lost things was supposed also to be a part of Witch Menée’s trade.

“You los’ yo’ brass finger ring? Dar. Sence you los’ it you has cramps in yo’ hand ev’y time you milks yo’ cows? Co’se you does. How can you find dat which is los’? I tell you. You take up some ashes off de hea’th des twixt daylight and dark, and save ’em twel fust-day nex’ mornin’. Den ’fo’ nobody on de whole plantation gits up, you go to yo’ do’ wid de sifter in yo’ hands, and put dem ashes in dat sifter and stand in de do’ and sift ’em out, dis way, dat way.

“De way dem ashes floats off from de sifter, dat way you ’ll find dat finger ring. Yes, ma’am. Thanky, ma’am,” closing her hand over the fee for this valued information.

The dark midget turned to greet the children that were never far from her on her visits to the Quarter.

“Um-hum. Yas,” she declared sententiously, “but dar’s a heap er things los’ what ain’t nuvver gwine be found. Dar’s Mis’ Hummin’ Bird’s voice. She ain’t



“De way dem birds fit !”



BR'ER BUZZARD'S HAT AND FEATHER

nuvver to find hit. Dar's Br'er Buzzard's hat 'n' feather. He nuvver is to find it."

And what better promise of a story to follow could the children desire? So Jess consented to tell the story of the loss of



Br'er Buzzard's three-cornder Hat 'n' Feather



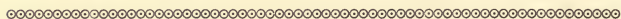
"**H**E was hale and hearty when he was young. Ole Br'er Buzzard was dat. He was des as handsome as high-topped June. He wo' a hat same as dese ole three-cornders dat rale ole folks useter wear. He had a fine white feather dat flew out behine. Why ain't he got it now? Now dat's hit.

"Heap er folks well as fowls ain't got dat which dey mought have. Hit's good to be proud to de ikle, but not to be proud beyont. Hit mighty good to be meek, but yer need n't be clean down stomped in de ground.

"Ole Br'er Buzzard, he can fly higher 'n airy bird; yet let him tetch de ground, and den who bow mo' and lower dan he?



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ He lak one er dese rale black nigger preachers : ’buse and ’scuse de white folks wo’sse sort at de meetin’s and bless-de-goodness de riches’ nigger in de county when de ’lection pas’ and mighty s’prise at de way de vote cas’. Yas, ole Br’er Buzzard ! He wiles’ man round de settlement — yit he de onlies’ one livin’ on de state. Um-hum.

“ How he git ter do hit ? Um-hum.

“ He rule de roost ’mongst de wile birds den, in de ole days when he wo’ dat hat ’n’ feather. He ’d a been rulin’ yit, maybe, but news come to de settlement as de State-Governor-Mister-Big-Man was comin’ by.

“ De wile birds take de news easy. Little wren twitter :

Tee-wee !

He can’t see me !

“ Owl deep in de swamp stay deep dar and holler :

Let him go back !

Go back !

Go back !

“ De kill-dee’ fly flashin’ by, singin’ :

Don’t keer,

No fear !

Don’t keer !

“ Jay bird give him de word back :



BR'ER BUZZARD'S HAT AND FEATHER



I say,
Let 'm stay 'way !
'Way !

“ Br'er Buzzard, he de wiles' one and he de blackes' one
in de lot. He croak out :

Hit's rough,
Hit's tough.

He better keep away, sho' 'nough.

“ But keep yer eye on Br'er Buzzard. He right 'long
side de road, settin' on de top rail er de stake 'n' rider rail
fence whar Mister-State-Gov'nor-Big-Man gotter pass.
He settin' dar wid his white feather flutterin' out on his
three-cornder high hat.

“ Nigh 'bout all de birds was hid deep in de woods.
Br'er Buzzard, he study 'bout dey was clean gone, all but
him. D'rectly dar was a trampin' and a rattlin' down de
gravel hill round de bend er de road.

“ Joree dart up and holler :

Dar he !
Oh, me —
Dar he !

“ Den off in de deep woods Joree flash, down deep in de
woods, he dash. Br'er Buzzard study he sho'ly is de
onlies' bird in de batch lef' now.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS




“Time Mister-Gov’nor-State-Big-Man come, Br’er Buzzard, he jerk off his hat. He bow low. He pull his fo’lock also. Meekes’ man in de land des now.

“Right den, up flash Cap’n Sparrer, hid twel den in de grass in de fence cornder. He dash past Br’er Buzzard. He fly quick, he flick dat hat out Br’er Buzzard’s hand. Dar now! Three-cornder hat and feather all trampled down deep in a horseshoe track. Hit be never no good fer nothin’ no mo’.


“Dar ole Br’er Buzzard sat on de topmos’ rail, pullin’ his fo’lock, bowin’ low, —shameder dan ever ter look up. He been bar’ head ever sence. Right now, dough, ef you come by and ketch him settin’ on de roadside on de rail fence, he ’ll bow to you. He bow low. He look down. Den he look round to see ef Cap’n Sparrer spy him.

“He do des dat way twel yit. He los’ his hat ’n’ feather, he did, but he got state-rights now. Ef you kill Br’er Buzzard, you got to pay fer it.”

Lost things being the subject of the talk that followed this story, Jess bethought herself of another story of loss in the bird world, and told the tale of one whom Vanity —



PLUCKED



Plucked



“**H**IT is a mighty quare thing fer ter see a bird dat can’t do no singin’! Hit look, too, sorter like singin’ b’longst to wingin’, des like words goes ter music. Hit’s cu’us dat de Bat is sech a diff’unt bird from t’other birds, — she be so still and ugly.

“’T wuz uppishness dat change her so past knowledge. In de ole times uppishness wa’n’t ’lowed ter run loose like hit do now. Dem was de days de folks make de hymn-chune ’bout,

High-head member come down!

You must come down, I say.

“Dem birds and creturs dat you see highes’ now wuz lowes’ den; dey riz on meekness. Dem you see lowes’ now wuz highes’ den; dey fell ’long er pride.

“Miss Bat dem days wuz de mos’ beautifules’ thing in de roun’ worl’. Topknot she *was*, long tail, seven coats er feathers, ev’y coat a diff’unt color; mouth full er song. Ev’ything glad ter see her, she step so high, and she fly so grand. She have de best uv all dar wuz growin’ in de worl’. She des sing and fly, and fly and sing. De birds wuz gittin’ ready fer ter name her queen uv all de birds.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Ev'y bird dat pass by 'bleeged ter give it up, ez she *was* de mos' beautifules' bird in de worl' and dey say her singin' was all jobly an' full er pleasjure.

“Den Miss Bat! Den and dar her head 'gin ter turn. She swingin' on de top plume er de cedar tree. De birds wuz passin' by. Dey say one ter de other, one and all singin' de song and carryin' de ballet also :

Tit fer tat,
Pretty Miss Bat;
She's like no bird
I ever heard
A-singin'!
An' diff'unt is she
Fum all dat I see
A-wingin'!

“Bat, she 'gin ter whirl round and round on de top er dat cedar tree. De birds yit singin' :

Dis or dat,
Pretty Miss Bat!
She's pretties' one,
An' she ain't like none, —
Nairy a one!

“Right den wuz when her head turn clean round. She say :



PLUCKED



No, no! I ain't like airy one.
And I won't be like nairy one.

“Des den de peckerwood come by, wid his crest so high, and Bat, she holler out:

I won't be like him,
A-shake-y-te-bim.

“Dar! She done shuck all her wavin' crest clean offer her head.

“Den red bird pass by—he look like a flyin' rose, flutterin' he goes, dis way, dat way. But Bat sing out:

Ef I hatter be dead,
I won't be red.

“Dar! She shake off de fust one er dem seven coats er feathers dat she got on her; fer dat fust coat er hern was red ez a fish-pizen-flower in April.

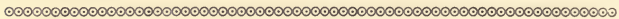
“Pretty little bluebird come wingin' and singin' by des den, lookin' lak ef his elbows done wo' out de sky 'ud do ter patch him up. Foolish Bat sing loud:

Fer true, fer true,
I'll be diff'unt fum you,
And I sha'n't be blue!

“Wid dat she strip de second coat, de which was des ez clear a blue ez de bluein' water dat a fust-class washer-woman gets ready fer ter blue de cloze.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Den ! Flitter ! Flitter ! Heah come de little rice bird, des ez yaller she be ez a streak er sun. Bat ’s s’ mad she kin hardly sing :

I won’t be yaller,
And dat I know,
So my yaller coat,
Away you go !

“ Off Miss Bat shake ’nother coat.

“ Den de peacock tuck a long flight, his wings was wide, and his tail spread fur. He was green, sah ! ez a fiel’ er tosslelin’ corn. Bat, she ain’t got no mo’ sense dan ter scream out loud :

Whar ’s you goin’ ?
Go ’long ! Go ’long !
T’ain’t gwine ter be seen
Dat Bat’s wings air green !

“ Wid dat word off go ’nother coat. Den de black-birds come a-chatterin’ by. Ev’y one black and sleek, ev’y wing swif’ and quick. Foolish Bat’s head is turned so she ’ll never git it straight again now ; she shriek :

Go ’way, blackbird !
’T ain’t gwine ter be heard,
Dat fine Miss Bat
Gwine look like dat.



PLUCKED



“Heah she skin off ’nother coat er feathers. Den!
De gray birds come skimmin’ by, softly, swif’ly. Yas,
dat silly Bat hop up and down on de tiptop er dat tree,
and she holler again :

I won’t be like you,
An’ dat word is true ;
Green, yaller, or blue,
I shan’t be like you !

“Den off go one mo’ set er feathers. Chillen ! Yas !
Heah come de dove. She float ’long like a lily got loose
from de stalk. Dat Bat got no sorter sense lef’. Dar she
got herse’f now des ez white, an’ dat las’ feather coat er
hern des ez white ez a open boll er cotton. Hit be her
las’ coat and she knowed hit, too. Yit and still she sing
out :

I ’ll be black ez night
Befo’ I ’ll be white !
I ’ll be diff’unt fum dove
Ez sorrer fum love.
And I ’ll pull off onct mo’
Like I done done befo’.

“Skin and bone, brother, skin and bone ! Dar she
was, and not ez much ez a pinfeather ter kiver her. Den
de tree wan’t fer her ter nest in, de woods ain’t fer her ter
rest in, and daylight don’t suit her.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ She flutter round and round ; d’rectly Mister Man see her, and he sorter feelin’ sorrer fer her. He open de winder ter de loft er de house and let her in dar.

“ Den she cry and she cry twel she put out her eye. She blin’ twel yit. She bar’ twel yit. She des hatter fly round at night-times twel yit, fer she be dat ugly she shame’ ter be seen in de sun.”

There was that hint of chill in the air that brings the wild geese winging over. As a flock of them sped above the Great House and the Quarter, Jess, who had a story about every winged creature, told :



Why and How Geese Call Each Other

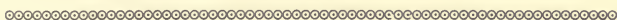


“ **S**ENCE de time when de wile geeses flew off and left de tame geeses on de green in front of de Gre’t House, dar’s yit and still been a gre’t larment ’mongst dem what was left behine.

“ Hit’s dat way wid folks same as wid fowls. When dar’s been wileness in de fambly, you is al’a’s lookin’ fer de same ter crop out ag’in. Hit keep folks and even fowls destrus’in’ all de time. Ter dis day when ole Miss



WHY AND HOW GEESE CALL



Nancy Goose, dress in solemn gray, git ready ter lay, she won't trus' Ole Mister Hagar Goose to leave her.

“Right over de nes' he gotter stand on one foot a-waitin' and a-watchin' and a-hissin' out :

I 'm gwine stay,
Sta — sta — stay.
I ain't gwine away — way !

“Mo' 'n dat, he gotter stay right dar all hatchin' time also. Dey 'pear lak dey got a distrust'us min' all time. I don't blame 'em, 'caze dat goose fambly is sho' been all broke up wid wile ways. Dey skeered dat wileness gwine break out ag'in in ev'ry gineration. Wileness 'mongst a fambly is worse 'n a ha'nt in de house. Ha'nts keep yer skeered 'twixt dark and daylight, but er streak er wileness in de fambly keep yer skeered up all de time.

“Ef one goose git los' des a minute fum y' o'her, you can hear 'em holler ter de one dat's los' :

Whar's ole Hagar?
Whar's ole Hagar?

“Dat one dat's los' off, he hear dat hollerin' and he hiss and chuckle in his throat :

Heah's ole Hagar —
Heah's ole Hagar —
Quick — Quick !
Quack !



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“ Den de ole goose and de ole gander, dey gits toge’her ag’in and dey swings off toge’her hiss’in’ one ter de y’ o’her :

Hagar won’t go to de wilderness !
Hagar think de pen is safe and bes’ !
Safe res’ ! Safe res’ !
Quick ! Quack !

“ ’T won’t be a minute atter ef de ole gray goose get los’ off fum de gander, hid behine de soap pot or de ash-hopper, and you ’ll hear de ole gander :

Whar’s ole Nancy ?
Whar’s ole Nancy ?

“ Heah come ole Nancy ter ole Hagar hiss’in’ and chucklin’ in her throat :

Heah’s ole Nancy !
Heah’s ole Nancy !

“ Den dey spreads dey wings out wide and dey runs one ter de y’ o’her, hollerin’ :

Heah we ! Heah we !
You ’n’ me ! You ’n’ me !

“ Den dey goes ’long side ’n’ side, dey swings off toge’her and dey hisses one ter de y’ o’her, and chuckles in dey throat :



WHY AND HOW GEESE CALL



Nancy ain't gwine fly away,
Nancy she des gwine ter stay.
Slow work — good pay!
Quick! Quack!
Gwine stay!

“ But 't ain't no time 'fo' dey at hit ag'in :

Whar 's — ole Hagar?

“ And de y' o'her one ansah back :

Heah 's — ole Hagar,
Quick! Quack!

“ Den ag'in you hear 'em at it :

Whar 's ole Nancy?

“ Den de gray goose chuckle and hiss back ag'in :

Heah 's ole Nancy!
Quick! Quack!

“ Dem dat 's one year ole and des paired off, dey is at it, too. Dey mind is so distrus'us, also. Hit all time wid dem same as wid ole geeses :

Whar — you, Jacob?

Whar — you, Jacob?

“ When de young gander hear dat, he come fum 'hind de bored-well trough, or de cowshed, or whe'r he be hid; he come hiss'in' :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Heah me, Kitty.
 Hesh yo' nonsense!
 Heah me, Kitty.
 Hesh yo' nonsense!
 Quick, quack! quick!

“Hit go 'long 'twixt and 'tween dem geeses des dat way whole endurin' time.”



Evening



TWILIGHT lies close about the earth. Darkness has come earlier to the world with its edging of swamp lands than to the milky-white heavens above.

White magnolia flowers shine out of the darkness of their leaves like stars ere the stars are abroad in the sky. Long clouds of white miasmatic mists drift up and out towards the line of swamp forest.

The earth is dusky and misty with these earth clouds, lit with the gleam of magnolia star-flowers, and perfumed as with ambrosial odors. It is as if mysterious splendors of Olympus had descended for a brief space on the world.

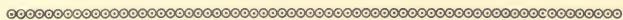
Any noise of humanity would be an impertinence to the



““ Whar you, Jacob?””



EVENING



great quiet of nature. And strangely incongruous is the babble and laughter of the Quarter folks. These know Nature only as the great feeder, and her beauty is veiled to them. She is their supporter but to be used and abused.

Only one moment is their laughter and talk silenced while Nature's interpreter, the Mocking Bird, sends forth his song from the swamp edge. He strikes without warning into his evening hymn of praise. A thrill, a song, a mimicry of all bird voices, the very spirit of the luxuriant beauty of the South lives in his music. Even ignorance must pause a moment in its babbling to listen entranced.

"He is de master bird," exclaimed Old Sol after a space of silence; "he can beat ev'y bird dar is at singin', also at fightin'."

"He's wid us all de year," asserts one.

"Dey say in de ole days," began another. And here followed one after the other in quick succession many stories of that "master bird."

To the many stories of Mister Mocking Bird's powers and cunning, Witch Menée's daughter added her share.

The story that Jess told anent his thievish proclivities was:—

PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

Excuse For the Rogue

“ **D**ON'T 'buse me !
Excuse me !
Won't yer? Won't yer?
Don't yer? Don't yer?
'Scuse me.

“ Dat des what Mister Mockin' Bird sing. You can't 'fuse him neither. In de fust times he set, lak he do now, on de highes' limb of a cedar tree, singin'. Law-sy-massy me, how he did sing! 'T was :

You can't see me
Pi-pee.
Hidin' in de tree —
Pi-pee!

“ Little Sis' Wren say :
Sweet Song. Suit me —
Pi-pee!

“ And 'fo' Mister Mockin' Bird know what she 'bout, she was off wid dat song. Sis' Wren done kep' dat song twel yit.

“ Den Mister Mockin' Bird, lost er dat song, think up 'nother :



EXCUSE FOR THE ROGUE



True Blue —
Ah, you —
Dat 'll do !
I 'll give one fer two,
O la ! Lu !

“ Dat song suit Mister Bluebird so good dat he des put hit right down in his song-book. Hit 's dar twel yit.

“ Den Mister Mockin' Bird, he so full er song, he don't keer ef he be cheat outen 'nother one, he sing deep in his throat :

Chip out o' white oak —
Sorry you spoke !
Chip out o' white oak —
Sorry you spoke !

“ Chuck-will's-widder been settin' still in de swamp, tryin' ter think up a song. Dat des suit her, and she start up ter hum and catch hit. Hit sound so pleasant to her dat she sing it over 'n' over twel yit.

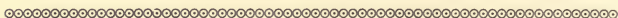
“ Hit went on dat way all dat fust-time day. Partridge tuck up fum Mister Mockin' Bird his

Bob White !
Corn ripe ?
Not quite !

“ Fiel' lark, she done get up early ter snatch de fust song of Mister Mockin' Bird :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Laziness kill you!

Des now!

Right now!

“Fiel’ lark done mark dat song in his own name,
Folks call it his twel yit.

“Now, when Mister Mockin’ Bird choose to sing over dem songs what he made hisse’f, all dem birds claim he singin’ dey songs. Dat’s de way wid folks also. You tech chillen sense, and nex’ thing dey know mo’ ’n de one dat larned ’em. Dey ’ll be tellin’ you right along de things you is done tole dem lak dey make it.


“I don’t fault Mister Mockin’ Bird fer singin’ des what he please. De birds done claim all fum him, done lef’ him nothin’ ter call his own.”

“Birds done mighty quare in de fust times,” said Old Sol; “dey stole, and fit, and quar’l some lak free niggers does now.”


“Is you ever heard ’bout how ’t was dat de turkey gobbler and duck ’gun dey quar’l what dey keeps up twel yit?” asked Jess.

“Tell it,” said Old Sol laconically.

And Jess told the story of early times.



DAY'S A-BREAKIN'



Day's A-Breakin'



“**H**IT ain't natchel fer all kinds of beasts and all sorts of birds to meet up 'dout some quar'lin', no mo' dan 'tis fer members of diff'unt churches. Diff'unt colors and diff'unt kinds is des bound ter keep a sorter quar'lin' wid one 'nother des to kinder keep de peace. Hit's dat way 'mongst de wile beas's and de tame. 'T was des dat way wid de duck and de turkey. Turkey Gobbler 'long of a sorter 'stinguishment of size got so biggety dat he thought hisse'f too fine to 'sociate wid anybody. Ole Mis' Hen, she might wrastle wid de heat all settin'-time and bring off a brood of Plimith Rocks, fourteen in all, and she might raise 'em ev'y one full growed and feathered,—and Mis' Turkey, she might go and los' all of her chillen 'long of de dew-itch, yit and still Mister Turkey gwine go like he mo' bigger man dan de rooster. Mister Gobbler and all de rest of his fambly might git cotch in de weather, 'caze dat fambly ain't overly smart, ain't hardly ever had de sense to come out de rain,—same time Mister Drake wid his folks 'll go daddlin' round and sheddin' water off dere backs same like off de Gre't House roofs; but all de same when de sun shine out



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

ag'in, ole Mister Gobbler, dry onct mo' and spruced up, out he marches like 't ain't no such thing as gittin' beat in 'lection time. He strut up and down. He spread out his tail. He swell hisse'f up like a feather-bed out sunnin' on a June day. He scrope his wings on de ground, and he say, says he :

Bur-r-r — bur-r-r — ah — ah !

I can thunder when de sun 's a-shinin' !

I 'm a big man — dat what I is.

Bur-r-r — bur-r-r — ah — ah !

“ De turkey hens come atter him, tippin' 'long and dat silly as ter b'lieve hit all. Mister Gobbler make like he ain't never heard of bad weather, wet feather :

Bur-r-r-r — bur-r-r-r — ah — ah !

I can thunder when de sun 's a-shinin' !

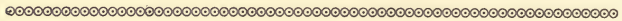
I 'm a big man, — dat's what I is !

Bur-r-r-r ah — ah !

“ He git too proud. Den dar come up a big confabulatin' 'mongst de hens, de ducks, de geese, de guineas, and all 'bout what can dey do. Mister Gobbler gittin' so biggity nobody can't stand hit. De hens turn derese'ves round, singin' 'bout it. De drake git all his folks together wid dere heads turned in — whack — whack — whackin'.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



was studyin' mo' 'bout de high cedar and sleepy time dan 'bout jestic, so he des say: 'Let de man what 'nounces daylight fust to dis settlement be biggest man in de settlement. Des so.'

"None of 'em 'll trust derese'ves speakin' 'g'inst Jedge Peacock, but dey all whisper 'mongst derese'ves dat Duck be more 'n a ijiot ter 'gree ter dat, 'caze don't she know dat she roost low, and how kin she see ter 'nounce day ter dem what roosts high?

"But Duck, she say: 'So be! So be! De one dat 'nounces day fust ter de settlement 'll be de head man in it.'

"Den she waddle off and settle herse'f to sleep right under de roost tree. Gobbler, he gether his fambly and dey flutter round much to reach de highest limb. He say:

I goes up whilst de sun goes down,
I'm de biggest man in dis heah town!

"Miss Duck from de foot of de tree, she say:

So long! Br'er Gobbler, so long!

"De night hit sparkle up wid stars. Den dere come a sorter still spell. Den heah over de lastmost hedge of de worl's edge come a sorter streakin' of day. Gobbler did n't wanter be too fast. Rooster ain't yit crow. De



DAY'S A-BREAKIN'



brindle cow ain't yit low. Ev'ything des as still as a wo'-out gristmill. Gobbler wait a while. He open his eye ag'in. One little bit of red showed up 'way over on de prairie edge, little blue blowin' round it like somebody carryin' a smokin' torch off yonder for to set de sky blazin'. Den Gobbler knowed dat day was comin' a-boomin' and a-hummin'. He lean over de roost-limb and he gobble out easy — des so :

Oh, Duck ! Duck ! Duck !

“ Ev'ything des as still. Mister Gobbler chuckle to hisse'f: ‘ I 'm mo' ahead of de settlement dan ever ! ’

“ So he lean over ag'in and gobble easy — des so :

Duck ! Duck ! Duck !

“ He 'll des wake duck and den he 'll 'nounce de news of mornin' to de whole settlement. Duck hear, but she make 'tence dat she don't. So Gobbler lean out and he gobble little louder :

Oh, Duck ! Duck ! Duck !

“ Dat cunnin' Duck ! She never stirred a wing feather, — she des reach up her neck, and she whack out — loud :

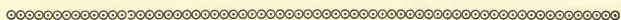
Day ! Day ! Day !

Day ! Day ! Day !

“ Dar now ! De 'nouncement of day was done give to de settlement, and all de neighborhood knowed de voice



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



dat give it. Well, ever since dat day when ole Mister Turkey git mad, you can hear him gobblin' to hisse'f:

Duck ! Duck ! Duck ! Duck !

“ And 'caze of Miss Duck's smartness dat day, de whole lay-out of ducks from de fust cousin to de last cousin, took to sayin' :

Day ! Day ! Day ! Day !

“ You can hear dem sayin' dat any time :

Day ! Day ! Day ! Day ! ”

“ Yas, ” assented Old Sol when the story was told, “ hit was des dat way. De way dat dey got a start in de fust times dat way dey is gwine on twel yit. ”

He seemed old enough to know by personal experience the happenings of the old days, and Jess's stories seemed wonderfully true as he pointed their progress with sage words and grunts of approval.

She told, as she gathered up her fees ere departing, the story of



Robin Red Breast



“ **B**IRDS all talkin' 'bout what dey gwine do and what dey ain't, des lak de niggers did when de coun' surrendered and dey hear dat dey is rale down free.



ROBIN RED BREAST



“ Mockin’ Bird say, talk ‘bout a home: any sorter nest ‘ll do him. But he do say give him all de songs in all de whole worl’. Dat what he got. All de birds’ singin’ dat dar is in de whole worl’, and des a passel er sticks fer a nest.

“ Buzzard say, he des ax fer full range er flight and all de meat he can eat. Dat what he got. He range de whole earth and sky, and all b’long to him dat die.

“ Peacock say, ef you want to suit him give him hind sight and fo’ sight also :

Pea-hoy ! Pea-hoy !
Pea-hoy ! Pea-hoy !
What he git, he ‘ll enjoy —
Pea-hoy !

“ Well, de peacock, he ‘s de onlies’ livin’ bird dat ‘s got eyes befo’ and eyes behine also.

“ Dove say, give her all de knowledge dar is in de whole worl’. Dove knows ever’thing ‘fo’ hit come to pass, knowledge of de fust things and knowledge er de las’.

“ Rain crow say, des let him pump water and holler fer de rain to come. Dat he do twel yit.

“ What dey all wish fer dat dey all git.

“ Robin Red Breast, he was all over grayish den. He did n’t hardly show up ‘t all in de woods ; he little, and he



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

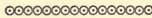


got no glow and no show when de Spring 'Vival come. So he take de chance when things advance and say he want'er look spruce. He say, give him a neat-fittin', well-settin' red ves', — he ax no mo', he let de res' go. Well, he got dat red ves', so did Robin Red Breast. He look spruce in it, too, he do. But lak he say, dat all he got, whether or not :

Short song
 Not long —
 Dat red ves'
 Is de bes'
 Dat he get.
 He got no home,
 He 'bleeged ter roam.
 Well, dat suit him —
 Nairy a nes',
 But a neat red ves'."



With a Love Charm



LAVINA had by appointment met Witch Menée's daughter at the edge of the settlement. Lavina wanted the swamp child to bring from her mother a



“He wanter look spruce.”



WITH A LOVE CHARM



“power” that would compel a lingering lover to come to see her.

She had without doubt already possessed herself of other “powers” to sprinkle on the lover’s head, or to drop into a gourd of water handed to him to drink, if she could only get the laggard in reach. Such a “charm” was to be had, for plantation lore knows no lapses in its professed completeness.

Lavina handed Witch Menée’s daughter the promised fee on learning that she had from her mother the desired information to impart. In so unique an instance as this, the fee was to be money.

Jess closed her hand over the fee and in that low, even tone of the negro that falls deeper than any whisper can, repeated the potent charm :

“Buy a bran new shoe. Turn de sole clean back’ard — toe to heel. Nail a bright new nail thoo it. Bury it under de do’sstep.

“You’ve got to do all dis, Lavina, twixt daylight and dark,” cautioned Jess; “you not got ter let any livin’ pusion know you done hit, or gwine do it. Ef you do it des dat way, den yo’ lover bound to come to see you.”

By this time, the children of the settlement had found that the child from the swamp was near. As Lavina left her, well content with confidence in the efficiency of her



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

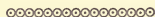


charm, the children came from all the cabins of the Quarter calling to Jess to come nearer.

They pressed her for a story. Seated in the sand of the neighborhood wagon-road, in blazing yellow sunshine, the small story-teller began the story of



De Big Quar'l



“**A**FTER Br'er Hawk done pen up Br'er Rabbit and lay ter pick his bones, hit look lak Br'er Hawk can't rest 'dout his stomach be full. He all time flyin', and spyin', and startin', and dartin', and pickin', and stealin'.

“ Mis' Rabbit, she mos' feared for her chillen ter git outside her house.

“ Miss Partridge skeered fer her little chillen ter git even on to de aidge er de corn-fiel'.

“ Mis' Susan ain't able ter find 'nough flint rocks on de plantation fer ter insu' half er de new broods.

“ Dar wa'n't no peace in de whole settlement 'long er Br'er Hawk and his devilment. Things gittin' so tight fer Br'er Hawk dat he could n't do nothin' but dart around in de deepest woods. He don't dare show his face in de neighbor path nor big road. He was des dartin' round in



DE BIG QUAR'L

de thickest' woods one day. He so hongry. Ever'budy yonder ter de settlement watchin' out fer him, and 'busin' him, and 'fusin' him, and 'scusin' him. He wonder whar he gwine to get his nex' meal's vittles. He set on a limb ter study. He draw his eye down. He wink. He blink. D'rectly he see somethin' he ain't seed de like befo'.

“Gracious goodness me! What do he see but a nes' full er de pretties', fattes', roundes' little white things uvver he did see. He look at 'em. He ain't nuvver seed a sight like dat befo'. He dunno what dem little white fellers is. Dey mo''n apt ter be chickens, dough dey is in a holler tree. But dey sho' do look lak little bit er all white, all right chickens.

“Br'er Hawk, he sho' 'stonish'; he say :

Gracious goodness me!
Ole hen stole a nes', I see!
Raisin' chickens in a tree!
And dat raisin' des suit me!

“Dar now! Time de las' wing and breast was gone, Br'er Hawk, he hear sech a-flockin' and a-flyin', a-callin' and a-cawin'.

“Gracious goodness me! A flock er crows he see makin' fer dat holler tree. Br'er Hawk, he do not stop ter see 'bout what can de matter be. He lit out. But de



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

crowds done seed him. Ev'y crow set atter him. Mis' Crow in de lead. Hit look des lak a flyin' black cloud behine ole Br'er Hawk. Br'er Hawk, he flew and he flew. He so tired he don't know what to do. He 'bout to give out when he seed a holler tree, and he dart in it, he do, and he pull a light wood-knot atter him ter stop off de crows fum gittin' him. De crows, dey gather round dat tree whar Br'er Hawk done gone in de holler of. Dar was mo' crows dan Br'er Hawk uvver did see. Ole Mis' Crow, she in de lead. She de maddes' one in de bunch.

“ Br'er Hawk, he gap and gap and ketch breath and wonder what can de matter be. Den he 'low he'll argufy wid de flock er crows. He slip round de holler and he find a knot-hole. He look out er dat knot-hole, and he ax :

Crows and crows, won't you tell me
What and can de matter be?

“ Mis' Crow, she flew at de knot-hole, she did. When she see she can't git ter Br'er Hawk, she holler :

Hawk and hawk and you ax me
What and can de matter be !
Whar my chillen in dat tree ?
Many left. None now I see !
Hawk ! Hawk ! Hawk !
Say whar dey be !



DE BIG QUAR'L



“ Gracious goodness me! Now Br'er Hawk, he know and see des what might de matter be. Ole hen ain't stole no nest, he see. Ain't raise no chickens in no tree. He come to de knot-hole ag'in ; he say :

O Mis' Crow !

O Mis' Crow !

Tell me, and how could I know

Dem white chillen dey was yo's ?

I nuvver had no sech suppose !

O Mis' Crow,

O Mis' Crow,

Lemme off. I did not know !

“ Den ev'y one er dem crows, dey made fer dat knot-hole, dey did. Br'er Hawk, he little mo' 'n feared dat dey gwine break thoo to him. He wait deep in de holler. He winkin', he blinkin', he thinkin', twel de crows all settle on de limbs round about and den he come to de knot-hole fer ter argufy ag'in. He peep out. He say :

Please ter 'scuse me, ev'y crow,

Cross my heart I did n't know —

Dem white chillen yo's fer sho'.

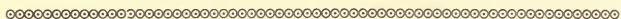
Lemme off and lemme go,

Never do dat way no mo'.

“ But dat was a quar'l as dar wa' n't no splicin' up. Dat



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



was de sorter argufyin' as did n't have no satisfyin'. Dat quar'l wa' n't no small 'sputement. Dem crows, a many and mo' of 'em is yit watchin' and talkin' and plannin' round dat tree. Br'er Hawk, he's yit peepin' out dat knot-hole mighty anxious."

This story, as told by Witch Menée's daughter, is true history to the negro. All over the coast country, all over the highlands this story is told. Its confirmation is that even to-day if a flock of crows see a hawk they fly at him with a peculiar caw which the darkeys translate to :

Hawk ! Hawk ! Hawk !

The hawk at the sound either shivers down to hiding under cover, or failing that, darts away from the pursuing crows, shrieking :

Chicken ! Chicken ! Chicken !

which the negroes declare is a reiteration of his first excuse : "I thought dem birds was chickens ! Chickens !"

Following this classic of the woodlands, Jess told her audience a story not so familiar to them — a tale of the



GUINEAS



Guineas



“**W**AY in de fust times dar wa’ n’t no pusson in all de country round ’cept Miss Susan and de children: dar was des one ole nigger-man, named Johnny Mingo, what lived sorter behine Miss Susan’s house in de only cabin, in de whole worl’. Dis heah Johnny Mingo had de run of de kitchen like y’ o’her good ole niggers does in dese days also. Miss Susan had a truck patch, and y’ o’her side de truck patch was a high mountain; y’ o’her side of de mountain Mister Injun lived. Mister Injun was a great one to pick and steal; he was al’a’s comin’ to de Gre’t House to see what he could get.

“Dem days Miss Guinea, she wa’ n’t sech a speckled, squallin’ thing as she is now. No, her head was feathered and her tail was high, same like Mister Rooster’s is twel yit. She did n’t have nairy a spot on her neither. And for a fine singin’ voice, Guinea could n’t be beat.

“Mockin’ Bird used to come visitin’ to try to learn the song dat de Guinea sing. Ev’y evenin’ ’bout sundown, Miss Susan uster set in her rockin’-cheer and call for Guinea. She come, so pretty she was den; her neck feathers was ruffled same like a game-cock’s fightin’. She



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



would des sing and sing, twel by 'm' by, Miss Susan would shet her eyes behine her spec's and go fast to sleep.

“Many evenin's dat Injun crope up nigh dat window to listen to dat song also. He so like dat singin' dat he 'low to hisse'f dat he 'll sho' make a way to steal dat critter dat can sing so good, and take her 'crost de mountain wid him.

“One night, sho' 'nough, whilst Miss Susan was sleepin' behine her spec's, he crope up clost to dat winder and whilst Miss Guinea was singin' her sweetest note, he grab her by de throat. He cotch her dat way to stop her voice; he held her so tight dat she could n't even squark. He held her so tight dat he rubbed off all her fine neck-feathers. Dey is rubbed off twel yit. He done already stole a bag of speckled peas out de aidge de truck patch and had 'em hung 'crost his back; he did n't notice neither a teeny, weeny hole in dat bag.

“As he go, — here dey go, — dem fiel' peas, des one by one drappin' des 'long by 'long on de path he take. Runnin' fas', dat Injun git des over de crown of de mountain and see de smoke from his little bark tent; he so tired, he b'lieve he 'll step 'crost de path a little way and git a drink of water at a spring he know. He know dat bag of peas can't run away, and he study de Guinea so nigh



GUINEAS

strangle she can't run neither, so he lay dem bof down in de path. De spring was most froze over, so he stop to crack up all de ice—and do stay some time. Miss Guinea, she ain't too strangle to lif' her head and look about. She say: 'Dis country, hit too cole fer me.' Snow what was al'a's on dat mountain hit beat on her back. You can see de marks of dat white snow dat fell on her pretty gray back twel yit. She say: 'I b'leeged ter get home and now is my chance.' But she study how kin she find de road. Injun tote her by de neck and head twel she ain't seed no road. But spyin' round dis way, pryin' round dat way,—like guineas do twel yit,—she spy one speckle pea! She run and peck up dat—des so. Den she see 'nother. She run to pick up dat. Den she see 'nother, and t' other, and t' other. She pick 'em up; she eat 'em up. Gwine on de track of de split peas she got far'er and far'er from de place whar' Mister Injun left her; gwine on she git closer and closer toward home.

“But on dat cole mountain her foots got red wid cole—dey is dat red twel yit—ain't dey? In dat cole she drawed her long, wavin' high feathers round her tight—she is real buntin' twel yit—ain't she? Des 'bout de time Johnny Mingo done nigh search de country over lookin' for Miss Guinea, and Miss Susan done nigh 'bout grieve herse'f ter death 'bout losin' her, here she come. But



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Miss Susan little mo' 'n' not knowed her pet : her top-knot and her ruffled neck feathers done gone, her foots so red, she was all spotted wid white, she 'd nairy a flyin' feather but was all buntin'. Also, she done cotch sech a cole twel her singin' voice all gone. She des could squark and squall. Time she hit de yard, she say, Miss Guinea did :

Come back ! come back ! come back !

“ Miss Susan holler :

You sho' is come back, sho'.

“ Johnny Mingo, he say : ‘ You is tellin' de truf' wid de ve'y fust word you is ever spoke ; but how did you find de way back ? ’

“ Den Miss Guinea made answer :

Pea track ! pea track ! pea track !

“ ‘ Dar ! ’ say Johnny Mingo. ‘ I 'spec' you is tole de truf ag'in. ’

“ Guinea, she kept tellin' de truf, and she ain't been able to tell anything but de truf, and dat special truf since :

Come back ! come back !

Found de way by pea track !

Pea track ! pea track !

“ Right den de guineas took to wanderin' ways ; dey got dem ways twel yit. Dey all time lookin' los' like ; dey



BUTCHER BIRD'S BOARD BILL



looks dat foolish way twel yit. Twel yit dey is al'a's bawlin' and callin' :

Come back ! come back !

Pea track ! pea track !”

Leaving the poultry yard and its domesticated creatures, Jess told of the



Butcher Bird's Board Bill



“**D**E sun in de sky do well to bow to de sun in de water, and de sun in de water do well to keep a-grinnin', 'caze dey dunno whicher one gwine be down and whicher one gwine be up in dis heah cu'us worl', and when. Hit lak de ole song :

Sometimes up ! Sometimes down !

Sometimes level wid de solid groun'.

“ I reckon folks got dat song fum Br'er Butcher Bird. Sometime I heah folks say de early bird gits de worm, — gits him, but den who gwine *eat* him ? Dat's hit now.

“ De sparrer fambly is mighty fore-runnin' folks. Hit is fust up in de mornin', hit 's fust *Cheep! Cheep!* at dawnin'.

“ Folks can't scurce sleep fer 'em cheepin'. I watches



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



dem sparrers at early spring as soon as de double plows begin to run, flocks and droves of 'em, follerin' ev'y plow :

Cheap ! Chip ! Cheap ! Chip !
Livin' s cheap ! Des now !
Follerin' de plow !

“ Ev'y plow full er dirt dat is turned over dey sparrers air flyin' over hit, pickin' at de bugs and de worms turned up. But let dem sparrers watch out fer dey vittles. Yonder on las' year's ole cornstalk sits Br'er Butcher Bird. He turn his head dis way, he turn his head dat way. Des time a sparrer pick up a worm — a big one — down flash Br'er Butcher Bird and nab de worm !

“ De sparrers all holler :

He 's mine ! He 's mine !
Whar gwine ? Whar gwine ?
He 's mine !

“ Br'er Butcher Bird, he don't pay no 'tention, he don't. He done flew off and done stick dat worm on de p'int of a thorn or on de stickeries of a wire fence, and dar he hang ter cure. Den Br'er Butcher Bird, he off ter watch fer 'nother one big 'nough ter steal. Br'er Butcher Bird, he hol' 'tain't hon'es' ter steal — 'doubt yer steal some'un big. Dat's hit now.



“Butcher Bird watch fer ’nother one big ’nough ter steal.”



BUTCHER BIRD'S BOARD BILL

“Dar he set on las' year's cornstalk. He turn his head dis way, turn his head dat way ; watch out fer mo' sparrers fer ter pick up mo' worms for him.

“Sparrers, dey air same lak laborin' folks, dey keep a-flutterin' over de plow same lak laborin' folks. De little worms 'long ter de sparrers. Br'er Butcher Bird, he gwine keep keer er de big ones. Dem sparrers, dey yit so happy 'caze de sun do shine, and de plows air gwine. Heah dey go, cheapin' yit and still :

Livin' s cheap ! Cheap !

Des now !

Follerin' de plow !

“Br'er Butcher Bird, he ain't sayin' much. Hit bes' when yer air on de watch fer big game`ter keep still. But now and den he pull in his big voice and holler des same lak he borned and bred in de sparrer fambly :

Livin' s cheap ! Cheap !

Des now !

Follerin' de plow !

“Livin' is cheap fer Br'er Butcher Bird. Hit's cheap livin' fer anybody when dey gits y' o'her folks ter pay dey board. Sparrer, he done beat Br'er Buzzard out his hill-top-land. He done hitch de jay ter de plow. He done keep Br'er Bluebird deep in debt. Yit he do shake in his



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



shoes when he hear de voice er Br'er Butcher Bird. He trimbles when he see him. 'Caze he know he got Br'er Butcher Bird's board bill ter pay. So he make out ter sing :

Sometimes up ! Sometimes down !

Sometimes level wid de groun'.

“ Dat 's hit now. When yer up keep a-bowin' ; when you down keep a-grinnin' . ”



Night in the Quarter



THE doors of the cabins in the Quarter were wide open. The strips of ruddy light from their hearth fires cut the darkness.

The Great House lay in gloom. Its present inhabitants found even its decaying splendors harassing, more so at this early night-time than at any other hour. Those who perforce dwelt in the old mansion were now out, visiting from cabin to cabin, or they had gathered with the gay crowd at one end of the Quarter where Jo-Jim struck his banjo and where a crowd of negroes sang, danced, and told tales. Or they had gone farther afield to the plantation church whose walls of hewn logs fit closely to the darkness.



NIGHT IN THE QUARTER

From its opened batten shutters came the fitful light of the pine torches ranged on its walls within.

In this rude church the "members" and the "elders" were gathered. They, too, were singing and dancing. Only the initiated could find much difference between these religious moves of the members and the jolly shuffles of the sinners. The members moved to and fro in interpretation of those old religious movements of the negroes: "Pull de Root," "Rock Daniel," and "Grabble Gran'ma's 'Taters," accompanying the strange rites with the dolorous singing of the old-time revival chant:

Move, Member, move!
Gwine ter Heaven, I know!
Move, Member, move!
Can't yer move des so?

At the farther end of the Quarter the gay sinners skipped to the banjo and the jolly singing of "reel-chunes." They danced their queer dances: "Git de Gun," "Rabbit Jump," and "Mammy's Needle."

Amidst all this barbarous excitement and gayety of the night-time, Witch Menée's daughter was at her happiest. Her more than half-wild life in the swamp made her more entirely than any other of these negroes an exponent of her color and her kind.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

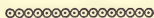
She told her stories by request, as does any other artist, to this group or to that as occasion brought them to her mind.

She was fearless of traversing the distance and the darkness that lay between her and her mother's cabin; for to these dusky folks, to her even more than to the others of her race, darkness and desolation seem but the softly enfolding arms of the All-Mother.

To the group of jolly dancers in the pauses of their shuffle and swing, she told how harm befell the Buzzard at just such a gay gathering as this as shown in the story of



Br'er Buzzard's Hat



“**D**E ole folks tells things diff'unt ways. Dis thing happen when dis one was young, and dat thing come to pass when de other one was des a stompin' 'bout chile. You des better hear all and choose which. Now 'bout ole Br'er Buzzard's bal' head, ev'y y' o'her ole folks you meet up wid tells dat tale and tells hit diff'unt; but all know and say he bal'. Some say atter he done los' de chance of havin' a nes' lak y' o'her birds, he mighty feared



BR'ER BUZZARD'S HAT

he gwine get missed of havin' somethin' else what some day he mought want. He keep hisse'f busy all de time watchin' out ter see what y' o'her birds was gittin' and choosin'.

“ One spring in de fust times at Mis' Susan's house, dar was set out lak hats fer de birds ; dar was de top-knot, de red-cap, de flyin' feather, and all sech.

“ De birds, dey all come dar fer ter choose. Time Br'er Buzzard got de news, he was dar. He gwine choose dis time. He ain't gwine lose dis time. He done part his hair in de middle fer ter fit and try on all he see. His hair was sho' in a pretty batch on each side er his head.

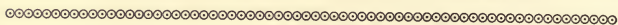
“ Mis' Susan 'bout ter line up all de birds fer ter begin dere pickin' and choosin' nice and decent. Dem birds, dey was all cheapin', and hoppin', and jumpin', and singin' — but ole Br'er Buzzard, he so big he ac' so biggity. He push right thoo de crowd. He holler so loud. He des lak one er dese heah low-lifed niggers so greedy dat dey push dey way thoo ter de pit when de barbecue smell sweet and strong. Dat de way Br'er Buzzard do. He see somethin' bright and high peaked a-settin' on Mis' Susan's fire-board. He hop over dar, jerk hit up, smash hit on his head.

“ Hey-yeh !

“ Dat thing, hit went clean over his head, eyes and all.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Des leave his mouf open, and did n't he squall? He holler:

Off! Off!

Take 't off!

Off! Off!

“De birds all set up sech a hollerin' also:

You — you — you

Greedy chooser, you!

You — you — you

'Bleeged ter be a loser, you,

True — true — true!

“Br'er Buzzard, he kep' up sech a 'larment, sech a hoppin' and a floppin', nobody could n't see no peace.

“Br'er Hawk, he retch and take a good holt and git good purchase on dat high-peaked, bright thing, and heaved to, and pulled, he did.

“Off come de bright, high-peaked thing.

“But law-sy-massy me! Off come Br'er Buzzard's hair and de tip-top of his head also. He was lef' wid a raggety red head lak you see him now.

“He ain't wait ter choose, lak a decent man. He done des jerk up de fust bright, high-peaked thing he see, 'membrance of his three-cornder hat 'n' feather Cap'n Sparrer done knock outen his hand. He done set Mis' Susan's candle-'stincher on his head.



“Off come de bright, high-peaked thing.”



RED CROWNED WARBLER

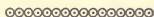


“Candle-’stincher? Ole folks useter set ’em on dey candles ole days fer ter put out de blaze.

“Br’er Buzzard ’s a losin’ man, he is. Yit he fly high and eat his fill.

“But my mammy, she tell me folks what visits al’a’s got ter take dey manners and behavior wid ’em, and she say folks what is bein’ visited got ter show dey raisin’ same way,” were Jess’s wise words. “Onct,” she continued, “a little bit bird come visitin’ and de rest er de birds ef dey had dey manners did n’t show ’em.”

Of course, the audience urged her to tell how that came about, and Jess, consenting, told the story of the



Red Crowned Warbler



“**D**ON’T keer who come to yo’ house, don’t yer turn ’em de burnt end er de pone and don’t yer po’ him yistiddy’s buttermilk. Nummine ef he do be little and puny as a Guinea nigger, and des plain brown ter clean mustee, still and yit you don’t know whar’r he ain’t got fust-class, molly-glaster hair under dat head-handkercher!

“’Long in de spring-time, ’way back in de fust time,



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



ever' bird done got him a new suit er cloze and it come 'long as fum fur down in de swamp dar come up in 'mong de birds a little bit stranger bird. He was puny and he was po'. He was little and he was light weight. He was des a patch er brown. He hop roun' on de limb, he say :

Twit-ter! ree!

Des me, tee-wee!

“Dat all he say. De owls, dey laugh 'crost ter one y' o'her, and make game at dat little bit stranger bird ; dey say :

Ha-ha-ha!

Qua-qua-qua!

Ha-ha-ha!

Qua-qua-qua!

“ Buzzard, he come perch on a dead tree and he j'ine in de fun at de little bit stranger bird :

Haw! Haw!

Caw! Caw!

“ Cap'n Sparrer and all his folks, dey crack jokes on de little bit stranger bird, and dey giggle :

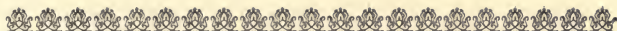
He! He! He!

Che! Che! Che!

“ 'T was time fer de singin' choir ter set out ter sing in de singin' match. Ever' bird start out and let loose on



“Den, chillun, he let out, he did.”



RED CROWNED WARBLER



dat spring singin' match. All done dey bes', and all praise de res', but nairy one of 'em ax dat little flat-head, dull-brown critter won't he j'ine in.

"All dat singin' gwine on, and dat little brown stranger bird, he des skippin' by hisse'f 'mongst de tree-limbs. He ain't sayin' nothin' 't all but des :

Twi-ter. Des me!

Twi-ter-ree!

"D'rectly dey birds, dey done all let out all dey know, den dat little bit stranger bird, he jerk his head dis side, he jerk his head sharp. All de res' done dey bes'.

"Den, chillun, he let out, he did. Law-sy-massy me! How dat little bit bird did sing! He ring his voice out clear lak a cane flute. He rattle his song 'bout lak seed in a dried gourd. He plink plank his chune like a banjo good strung and chune. He whistle and he sing.

"De whole High Choir, dey des look on, dey des set and listen. Bless life! As he sing, he done riz up dem feathers on his little flat head. Dar dey feathers stand a crown er red! Now de birds know him. He de Warbler wid de rosy crown, singin' all de res' er de singers down.

"Dar now! Whilst dey all axin' him: Won't he stay! he's fur away. Fust heah, den fur. Dat bird, he des stop in passin'.



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



“Dat’s right, chillen. Don’t keer who come to yo’ house, drap a extra thickness er Ole Ned in de pot ter make bit richer.”

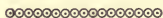
As the sounds of the hymns chanted at the church rolled down to the gay group at the far end of the Quarter, many of those hymns detailing awesomely the “’sperience” that must belong to every seeker :

I was hangin’ over hell,
I seed its fires well !

Jess was moved to tell another story of Br’er Jay’s Friday pilgrimages. She related a variant of the old legend of the troubles of



Bo’ Jay



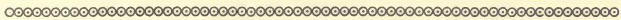
“SOME folks hates a jay bird, and some folks don’t. Hit’s des de way one is hearn de tale. Des lak dey fo’-pa’ents tole de tale, — dat way, dey b’lieve hit. Some folks say Br’er Jay takes a piece er wood, des a splinter, down to de Bad Place ev’y Friday fer ter help out Mister Devil, so’s ter let him ’n’ his wife, ole Aunt Squatty, have good kindlin’ wood all de time. Well, ef dey b’lieve dat, dey got good right ter ’spise Br’er Jay.



“ Takes a splinter down to de Bad Place.”



PO' JAY



“ But some folks tell de tale 'nother way. Dey say he make dat trip ever' Friday ter tote down des a grit er dirt. He make de trip sho'. Ever'body know dat. But fer what he go folks tells diff'unt tales. You sho'ly can't see a jay bird in dis worl' on Friday fum twelve o'clock twel three, — hit takes 'em des dat long ter make de trip. Dey make de trip, sho' — but what dey take wid 'em — dat's hit.

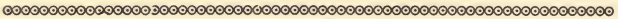
“ Some folks say Br'er Jay and all his fambly, his folks, his cousins, and his kin, does go dat way and d'rection, ev'y one totin' dey grain er sand in dey bill and drappin' hit *in* — des one teeny, weeny grit — wid de good hopes er fillin' up dat awful place.

“ Folks what b'lieve dat, dey puts gre't 'pendence in Br'er Jay. Dey set sto' by him, don't keer ef he do steal bird-eggs out y' o'her birds' nests, er bodacious kill young birds. Des so he do fill up dat awful place. Hit'll take mo' 'n millions and cillions er years ter do it ef dem jay birds kin do it den. Dat's hit now.”

Naturally from this story grew talk of death and dying, and Jess had her accordant story of

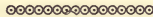


PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Mister Woodpecker

How He Plugs up Ha'nts



“**W**HAT Mister Woodpecker doin’ out dar? Tap!
Tap! Tap!

“He des rivin’ coffin-boards. How come he rivin’ coffin-boards? Lemme ax you, chillen, is uvver you seed airy dead bird in any yo’ wanderin’s in de woods? I ain’t. I ain’t nuvver heard of nobody dat is. Whar do de dead birds go? Dat’s hit now.

“Dat’s des what I’m talkin’ ’bout. Some folks say Woodpecker rives dey birds coffin-boards, and maybe crow preaches dey funeral des twixt daylight and dark. I dunno. I hear some folks say Woodpecker des plugs em up.

“Some folks say as niggers larnt de way ter plug up daid folks by de way daid birds is plugged up by Mister Woodpecker.

“Um-hum! You know how niggers, when somebody done daid, puts des a little piece er dey cloze in a tree, or a little some’un dey done had in a tree and plugs it up. Dey done dat when ole High Conjure Jack was done daid. Dat what keeps his ‘ha’nt’ fum conjurin’ and ha’ntin’ folks twel yit.



“He des rivin’ coffin-boards.”





THE ONE WAY OUT



“ Don’t nuvver cut down a tree what a Woodpecker done been round and round wid his Tap! Tap! Tap! ’Caze ef you do, you mo’ ’n apt ter let loose all de ha’nts of all de daid birds dat been in dis worl’ sence de worl’ wuz made.

“ Al’a’s let trees wid Woodpecker holes in ’em alone.”

After this grewsome story, Jess was making ready to start home through the darkness when a child reminded her of a promise to tell whether Br’er Hawk ever got free from the hollow of the tree where the flock of crows watched him. So Jess consented to stay long enough to tell of



The One Way Out



“ **H**AWK in dat holler, he des as oneasy as he could be. He set peerin’ out dat knot-hole. He know he safe. But den he know he also panned. Dat’s mighty bad fer a wile, free bird lak him. He study ’bout he done pulled dat lightwood knot in, but den how he gwine git hit out? Mo’ ’n dat, he know dem crows were plannin’ and schemin’ and gittin’ up some sorter trouble fer him wid all dere :



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



Talk ! Talk ! Talk !

'Bout Hawk ! Hawk ! Hawk !

“ Br'er Hawk, he peep out de knot-hole and he pestered in his mind. D'rectly de crows 'gin ter move off by lays and relays, some watchin' Br'er Hawk whar he peep out de knot-hole, some gwine, some stayin', some flyin'.

“ Br'er Hawk, he look out ter see what kin de matter be. Um-hum.

“ Now he know.

“ Heah come de ole leader Crow.

“ He got a rock in his mouf. He come ter de knot-hole. He drap in dat rock.

“ Br'er Hawk, he lip ter one side dat holler tree. He say ter hisse'f:

Gracious goodness me,

Dat is what de matter be !

“ Crows is al'a's packin' back things. Dey does it twel yit. Dey has dey ole holler trees and year by year dey fills dem wid pecan nuts and things fer when corn ain't fraish 'n' green.

“ Dar now. Dem crows is gwine pack back rocks 'pon top er rocks and gwine stop Br'er Hawk clost up— ef dey don't kill him right off wid flingin' rocks on him. Dat 's a tight place fer Br'er Hawk. Dat 's de tightest place Br'er Hawk been in twel yit.



THE ONE WAY OUT



“He come ag’in ter de knot-hole. He peep out. He wink. He blink. He think. He ’low he ’ll augufy des a little mo’, ef so be de crows ’ll let him go. Sho’ he won’t do so no mo’. He say :

Please, and please, sah, ever’ crow !
Please and don’t you ’buse me so.
I declar’ I nuvver know.
Promise I do so no mo’.

“Heah come ’nother rock in de knot-hole. Dat rock hit him. Hit nigh ’bout split him. Hit nearly git him. He lip to one side de holler tree. He wink. He blink. He think. Dat rock go mighty far. Whar dat rock go ?

“Br’er Hawk, he look down. He see a little light nex’ de groun’. He say ter hisse’f :

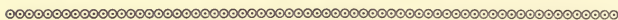
Gracious goodness me !
One way out I foun’, maybe !

“Br’er Hawk he ’gin ter creep and slip and slide down dat holler tree. Rocks keep peltin’ him.

“Crows are gwine ter de branch, flyin’ by lays and relays to de spring-branch, and bringin’ back pebbles. But Br’er Hawk, he beat and knock, by ever’ rock, but he trus’ he gwine git off wid his life. Rock hit him. Blim ! ’Nother hit him. Blam ! Down he roll. He feel lak he rollin’ down Mis’ Susan’s chimbley agi’n. Nummine,



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



he down. Way out he foun'. Off he dart, but he do
holler back one time :

I thought 't was
Chickens ! Chickens ! Chickens !”



Night in the Swamp



THE nights even in the distant cabin in the swamp
were not lonely to the child whose only glimpse of
life was the crowd and gayety of the Quarter about the
Great House.

At night within the cabin where the swamp wood,
gathered by mother and daughter from fallen trees, blazed
but fitfully, Menée told the child many and many of those
strange legends of birds which she retold to the Quarter
Folks.

Many of Menée's stories were of the owls. For the
stories and superstitions told of owls by the negroes are
numberless. These legends seemed like pages of history
to the child as she sat within the cabin and heard without
the hoarse laughter and cries of these night-birds as they
called to each other and answered from tree to tree.



OWLS



When Jess returned from the Quarter as the owls were making all the deep swamp echo with their hoarse cries, Menée told her one of the stories of the origin of those owls :



Owls



“**D**AR is de very sound of scrapin’ of pots and pans
in de voice of de owls :

I cooks

For my folks.

And who — who — who — who

Cooks fer. y’ all ?

“ When de worl’ was right new, a Stranger was gwine over de earth tryin’ ter help all folks and things, and he come to a holler ’twixt two hills. Down in de bottom of de holler was a little cabin. De Stranger was hongry, and ’low he ’ll go down dar ef de way do be steep and ax fer a piece of bread.

“ De cabin was full of ole women — ole, ole, ole womens ; when dey hear de knockin’ at de do’, dey gathered deyse’ves together, like ole womens does, and got to gigglin’ and makin’ great ’miration ’bout who dat



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS

knockin'. Dey would n't go to de do', but dey des set round de fire, dippin' snuff, smokin' dere corn-cob pipes, tellin' dere conjure tales, 'busin' dere friends, and 'scusin' dere neighbors. Also, ev'y one made game of ev'y y' o'her one behine ev'y t' other one's back. And soon dey done cookin' and gets up and empty out de skillits, turn de bread offer de bread-hoes, pour out de rich pot, scrape de spiders, — and den dey eat! dey do eat!

“De knockin' still gwine on. Dey don't pay no retention. Dey don't ax is anybody dar hongry. Dey des eats. When dey eats all what's good, one goes to one window and scrapes out a hoe; 'nother goes to 'nother window and clean out a skillit. Dey hear de knockin' outside, but dey des laugh and say:

Who-o-o — who-o-o — who-o-o

Gwine cook fer you?

“Den dey hear outside:

Will you gimme one piece of bread?

Will you gimme one piece of bread?

“De knockin' so steady and de tone so good dat dey air now gittin' skeered. Yit dey all make bole to say ag'in:

Us cooks fer our folks,

But who-who-who-o-o-o

Gwine cook fer you?



OWLS



“ Still and yit de knockin’ kept up steady and gentle lak twel at last dey gits mighty skeered up, and one ole woman she took a leetle, leetle, leetle bit of dough out de tray and flung it on a skillit yit settin’ on de fire-hearth. ’Nother ole ’oman she run and git de skillit-lid and put it on de skillit. Den dey all git de mo’es shame ’caze dey done eat so much and done prepare to give de Stranger so little. Dey so shame ev’y one of deyse’f and of all de y’ o’her ones dat dey des flap around de room, makin’ ’tense dey so busy dat nairy one can see ’nother one. Dey flap around and dey blink dere eyes.

“ But dat little piece of bread, hit begun to swell and swell and swell. Fust thing hit lift de lid off de skillit. Next thing hit swell so swift and so strong dat hit split de skillit wide open. Den, hit swellin’ roll all over de hearth. Den de far eend of hit begin to rise up de chimbly. Den de nigh eend begin to roll out on de puncheon-floor. Hit roll all over de floor, and hit begin ter riz higher and higher.

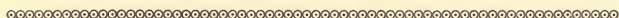
“ De ole women, dey begin ter jump off de floor and onto de cheer-seats. Dar dey stand perched up, holdin’ up dere skirts wid dere arms a-kimbo: des so !

“ De dough riz over de cheer-seats; de ole womens jumped on to de cheer-backs.

“ All dat time de knockin’ done kept up steady and



PLANTATION BIRD LEGENDS



soft. Nairy ole 'oman kin look straight at t' o'her, dey all so shame of de way dey done. Dey keep hoppin' 'bout, cluckin' deep in dere throats, blinkin' dere eyes, and turnin' dere heads. All de time de bread keep rollin' and risin' higher. Den dey hear de words creepin' thoo ev'y crack in de house :

You 'fuse ter give, you 'fuse ter lend,
You 'buse yo' neighbor, you 'buse yo' friend,
Hush yo' tattlin', hush yo' talk ;
You 'll never mo' have strength to walk !

“ Sho' 'nough, dere legs do git so weak dat dey des kin barely hop. Dey blinked dere eyes. Dey so shamed dat ev'y time one look at 'nother, dey bof des turn dey heads clean round 'fo' part behine. Dey cluck and dey quar'l deep in dere throats. Den dey hear :

'Caze you would n't open yo' do',
You shan't live in a house no mo' —
Fly out ev'y window you sees
And live all you in de holler trees.

“ De bread was riz so high dat des a hole was left at de top of de windows. Ev'y one hustle to fly out of dem holes. Ev'y one push and jostle de next one back, each and ev'y one feared dey gwine to git left behine.



OWLS



“Des as dey flew out, ev’y one turnt to a owl. Ev’y one hatter go find a holler tree ter live in. Dey gotter stay owls twel dey forgit all de ill dat dey know ’bout y’ o’her folks.

“But twel yit, dey air de worst mad wid each y’ o’her. Right now you can hear dem callin’ fum one tree to y’ o’her :

Go home! go home! go home!

Why ’n’ you go home?

You-o-o-o you-oo!

“Den de nex’ one calls to de y’ o’her :

You-o-o-o you-oo

Go home! go home!

Yo’s’e’f— you-o-o-o you-oo.

“And twel yit der ain’t none of dem got able to go home.”

THE END

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